

RURAL SELF-PLACING: HISTORY AND NARRATIVE IN THE
MODERN COUNTRY GARDEN

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the country gardens of a series of artists and writers working in the early twentieth century, arguing that the making of gardens, and the making of modern art, were reciprocal processes informed by a deep cultural need to self-place in rural English landscape. Studying garden sites alongside texts, visual and sculptural artefacts, and personal papers, I suggest that gardens can be read as making narratives that place individuals within a wider cultural and geographical landscape: as making “garden histories” that metaphorically reappraise and literally remodel traditional English landscapes for the twentieth century. Across five chapters, I study five figures who made distinct contributions to the arts: horticulturalist Gertrude Jekyll, Art Nouveau Artist Mary Watts, literary impressionist Ford Madox Ford, painter Dora Carrington, and modernist Sylvia Townsend Warner, unpacking a broad range of responses to English landscape, and demonstrating the exceptional relevance of the English country garden to a varied set of distinct modern arts. Despite the variety of gardens (and the variety of responses to English landscape) uncovered, the shared recourse to the narrative capacity of gardens—to the way gardens seemed to offer a way to imagine oneself back into the history—offers an exciting glimpse into a so-far understudied context for twentieth-century literature, where the country garden is understood as integral to modern innovation. In my demonstration of the cultural relevance of the country garden, I draw on a range of allied critical contexts from literary and art history, and emphasise the need to draw on garden historical methodologies to provide appropriately considered garden criticism within literary disciplines. Such methodological strategies offer much needed diversification to literary critical approaches to landscape: further challenging critical dichotomies between rural and modern; expanding the timelines by which modern rural art-making is approached; and calling for further study to populate the twentieth-century garden landscape.

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Introduction

In some subtle and mysterious way the country seems to offer us the chance, the mirage of attaining, each one of us, to his ideal.¹

— Ford Madox Ford

Self-placing, Garden History, and Rural England

This thesis examines the gardens of five writers and artists working in the half-century approaching the Second World War: a period of unprecedented development across the arts. These five figures—self-styled “amateur” horticulturalist Gertrude Jekyll, Art Nouveau artist Mary Watts, literary impressionist Ford Madox Ford, painter and maker Dora Carrington, and socialist and modernist writer Sylvia Townsend Warner—all made distinct and significant innovations to the modern arts of the period, and were also deeply engaged in the making of country gardens. The two drives were not unconnected: rather, I argue that the making of country gardens was integral to the working practices of each figure under study. Gardens offered a material way to remodel rural landscape that mirrored the processes of aesthetic experimentation, of figuring out style, of developing literary and artistic technique, and of finding one’s place within geographical and cultural landscapes. The reciprocal processes of garden and art-making led to re-interpretations of country landscapes marked indelibly by their long histories of representation in art and literature—the pastorals and the georgics, the poems of rural retreat and of the country house, the picturesque visions of charming country life and the agricultural landscapes of plenty, peopled with smiling workers—along with the real social conditions of a changing modern landscape, and thinking about how these fitted in to the making of modern art and literature.

¹ Ford Madox Ford, *The Heart of the Country: A Survey of a Modern Land* (London: Alston Rivers, 1906), p. 32.

The making of modern gardens appeared to offer a way to imaginatively reconstruct visions of the past, but also to retrofit the ways landscape was traditionally formed in keeping with more modern sensibilities. By reading gardens as physical sites, alongside their related literary outputs, personal papers, and artwork, I argue that we can think about these gardens and their associated works as providing narratives about modern rural England. These garden narratives offer up personal histories about how English countryside had formed, about what it should look like, and how it should be cultivated, remembered, and understood going forward into the twentieth-century. However, whilst they make histories about modern land, and were places where different versions of history might be told, these gardens were also sites with the capacity for more autobiographical figuring out: where individuals attempted to place themselves within a landscape and a history of their own making. These narratives, cultivated in and through the garden, and emerging in published poetry and prose, in painting, photography, sculpture and decorative gardenware, and within private letters and political polemic, invariably demonstrate an independently felt but shared need to place one's self and work within the rural English landscape.

The artists and writers in this study were joined in their engagement with English countryside through the garden, where traditional landscapes did not always sit easily against modern innovation. For Jekyll in 1904, it was becoming ever harder to forget that her beloved rural West Surrey was 'little more than an hour's journey' from London: and what was worse, the signifiers of historic rural life—the “charming” labourer's cottage and garden, and the handed-down furnishings and habits of early-nineteenth-century working rural life—were being lost in the ‘unceasing restlessness’ of modernity and passed ‘into dealer's hands’ to be ‘sold as curiosities and antiquities’.² For Jekyll, garden design became a way to redress this apparent change. As I demonstrate in my first chapter, she designed her gardens at Munstead Wood in rural Surrey to newly promote the appropriate cultivation of the traditions of local

² Gertrude Jekyll, *Old West Surrey: Some Notes and Memories* (London; New York; Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1904), p. viii; p. ix.

vernacular culture. Jekyll was located within a wider context of anxiety about the persistence of a vaguely understood “Old England”, which appeared to be in a process of rapid development: in 1911 fellow Surrey author George Sturt read the first decade of the twentieth century as displacing Surrey peasant populations for ‘new building and raw new roads’ that defied the visitor ‘to persuade’ themselves that they were ‘in a country place’; but this country was also a site for the upper middle class to settle in, cultivating dreams about a return to the land.³ ‘The old life is being swiftly obliterated’, wrote Sturt, and the country ‘passing out of the hands of its former inhabitants’.⁴ Such concern about defining a modern national landscape was mirrored across culture: two years prior, in *The State of England* (1909), Liberal Party politician C. F. G. Masterman had articulated the need to find where ‘the essential’ England resided—‘what particular locality’, he asked, would ‘stand to the future’?⁵ This he judged as a new difficulty: the England of a few generations past, he wagered, had been firmly placed in its countryside and its ‘feudal society of country house, country village, and little country town, in a land whose immense wealth still slept undisturbed’.⁶ ‘No-one today’, he continued, ‘would seek in the ruined villages and dwindling population of the countryside the spirit of an “England” four-fifths of whose people have now crowded into the cities’.⁷ To Masterman, the signifiers of the old country now appeared to signal to the past. He was nevertheless wrong that no-one would continue to invest in them. As this thesis demonstrates, such “traditional” places continued to hold exceptional cultural relevance.

From 1887-1934, and roughly five miles from Munstead, Mary Watts had been making gardens to surround the rural artist’s residence shared with her husband, the renowned portraitist and sculptor G. F. Watts. Whilst Watts was also interested in maintaining the historic charms of rural Surrey (a local landscape she saw as possessing a particularly ‘English character’), she was more concerned with

³ George Bourne, *Change in the village* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1912), p. 7.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁵ C. F. G. Masterman, *The Condition of England* (London: Methuen & Co, 1909), p. 11.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

cultivating a place for her own career in the decorative arts, and with working to maintain the reputation of her husband.⁸ Her gardens, as I examine in my second chapter, were an essential part in her attempts to establish herself within local and national artistic heritages, with careful landscaping central to her formation of a modern “Artist’s Village”. Moving further south-east to the Kent and Sussex of the 1890s, Ford Madox Ford was also trying to pin down the seductiveness of English countryside at a series of farmsteads. He was lingering on the habitual miseries of country life—dilapidation, poverty, and death—as well as the strange pull the landscape seemed to offer: an opportunity to be a part of a centuries-long tradition of living and working close to the earth. In 1906, he devoted *The Heart of the Country: A Survey of a Modern Land* to finding that “spirit” of rural England, and in particular, to understanding the popular phenomenon of the hunt for rural solace. Ford would muse that despite its miseries, the country seemed to offer ‘the chance’ of ‘attaining, each one of us, to his ideal’.⁹ His musings proved prescient to his own situation: as I argue in my third chapter, this “ideal” came to represent both the development (and his writing of the histories) of literary Impressionism, conceptualised as formed in the heart of rural England; and it also became emblematic of his post-war attempt to find ‘reconstruction’ in the English country garden.¹⁰ But Ford also articulated a wider pull: his musings on the potential of the country idyll proved prescient both across his own life, as well as crystallising aims held by figures across this thesis. For each, the pull of the ideal was strong, but it was never without its trials.

From 1912 Slade student Dora Carrington was drawn to the landscapes of Hampshire and Berkshire, leaning into the charm of traditional working landscapes studded with ‘bronzed’ ploughboys and overfull haycarts.¹¹ She was keen to differentiate her art-making from the previous generation’s responses to landscape, taking issue with the Edwardian garden painter and late Victorian bedding

⁸ The Watts Gallery Archives [TWGA], Mary Watts, Diary 1897, 14 August 1897.

⁹ Ford, *Heart of the Country*, p. 32.

¹⁰ Ford Madox Ford, *It was the Nightingale* (London: William Heinemann, 1934), p. 106.

¹¹ Dora Carrington, in Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina, *Carrington: A Life* (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995), p. 67.

traditions alike. My fourth chapter considers how her ideal country was one that made space for queer companionship, imaginatively populated with figures from literary pastoral. Whilst her gardens were not as explicitly based in the wider remodelling of English landscape, they were the place to cultivate more private ways to be queer and embed oneself within an invented heritage. Finally, Warner found interwar rural Dorset a grim modern landscape populated with rats and dirty water and unsuitably managed to sustain its inhabitants, likening the tired earth to the ‘conditions which deform’ the labouring population.¹² As my fifth chapter argues, she saw in the cottage plot the impetus for Marxist reform, both of the conditions of the rural village and of modern literature, interrogating the social function of the forms and genres, like the picturesque, the pastorals, and the georgics typically employed in the (mis)representation of English country. Read altogether, this thesis maintains that in the face of local and international political tumult, of war, and of a modernising nation, the country garden offered a way to cultivate a small portion of that wider England, to make “garden histories”, and to ground art and life in the pursuit of something better.

I build upon a rich garden historical tradition looking to unpack the meaning of designed landscapes. Gardens, as John Dixon Hunt has so comprehensively demonstrated, can be understood as an ‘art of milieu’ and as offering ‘eloquent expressions of complex cultural ideas’.¹³ They have long been sites from which patrons could dictate taste, relevance, and status; where designers could promote interpretations of rural England through their cultivations of landscape; and where (moneyed) individuals could materialise landscapes that best reflected their aesthetic interests, wider work, and intended place within set communities.¹⁴ They are places frequently composed from ‘acts of translation’ and histories of

¹² Sylvia Townsend Warner, ‘The Way By Which I Have Come’, in *With the Hunted: Selected Writings*, ed. By Peter Tollhurst (Norwich: Black Dog Books, 2012), pp. 13-20 (p. 20).

¹³ John Dixon Hunt, *Gardens and the Picturesque: Studies in the History of Landscape Architecture* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1992), p. 1.

¹⁴ See Dixon Hunt’s *The Figure in the Landscape: Poetry, Painting and Gardening During the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1976); Dixon Hunt, *Garden and Grove: the Italian Renaissance Garden and the English Imagination, 1600-1750* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1986); and Dixon Hunt and Peter Willis (eds.), *The Genius of the Place: The English Landscape Garden, 1620-1820* (London: Harper Collins, 1979); Roy Strong, *The*

adaptation—new representations of older ideas—making reference, like Carrington, to the landscapes of classical antiquity and the eighteenth-century from interwar Hampshire, or like Jekyll, tracing lineages that lead from the Italian Renaissance through seventeenth-century England to the early nineteenth century and onwards to the twentieth.¹⁵ They are consequently also places where cultural movements are set into space: where Jekyll could cultivate a modern “naturalist” garden style and industry; where Watts could find in ‘interweaving’ woodland greens her aesthetic vision for Art-Nouveau decorative pattern; where, for Ford, literary Impressionism was founded and then remembered; where, for Carrington, the pastoral played out; and for Warner, the georgic was enacted for new political ends.¹⁶

Recent scholarship has proposed that we can read the garden akin to texts and other objects. In her formative discussion of the relevance of pre-war garden design to English conceptions of nationality, Anne Helmreich argued that we can treat garden features—herbaceous borders, pergolas, or the planting of kitchen gardens—‘like semantic devices for those that can read their language’.¹⁷ Helmreich fittingly suggests that these semantic devices make up a rich and ‘malleable vocabulary’; but I propose that we can take this idea further still. I want to move our emphasis from considering how we “read” gardens, to consider how we “write” them: to not just think about treating garden features as having wider cultural meanings, but to think about how a series of individuals invoked these “semantic features” in their own work and gardens, and how they grouped and positioned them to make histories—to form narratives about self, work, and landscape. It is an emphasis that echoes such arguments as W. J. T. Mitchell’s classic proposal that landscape be approached as ‘a process by which social and subjective identities are formed’: where landscape is not just a “thing” that “means something”, but something that ‘works as a

Artist and the Garden (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Jill Francis, *Gardens and Gardening in Early Modern England and Wales* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

¹⁵ Dixon Hunt, *Gardens and the Picturesque*, p. 10.

¹⁶ TWGA, Mary Watts, Diary 1891, 18 June 1891.

¹⁷ Anne Helmreich, *The English Garden and National Identity: The Competing Styles of Garden Design 1870-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 1.

cultural practice'.¹⁸ This emphasis on the twinned writing—and making—of landscapes shifts our focus to the reciprocal processes by which sources are made; and my choice of “narrative” as an overarching way to categorise the active processes forming landscape also intends to signal to the fact that the “things” the gardens say are essentially marked by personality and invention. They can act as histories—like biography, or historiography even, in their evaluations of different interpretational approaches to landscape—but they are also deeply marked by fiction and imagination, by embellishment, and by their connection to the arts. For these figures, working, writing, and experimenting their ways into their own cultural canons, the garden offered the opportunity to materially cultivate a life into being, signalling the grounding importance of English landscape across the arts.

The garden offers a particularly apt capacity for narrative making because of its particular relationship with the passage of time. Gardens, after-all, are not quite like other arts: they grow. The perpetuation of any scheme is a process of continual work. In his 1962 memoirs, twentieth-century society gardener Russell Page mused that within ‘[a] few years of neglect’ ‘only the skeleton of a garden can be traced’.¹⁹ To Page, inheriting a traditionally nationalistic fascination with the meaning of such sites, the English garden appeared more unique still: these plots, he continued, ‘seem always to be in flux’—‘there is no finality and there would be no satisfaction if there were’.²⁰ Instead, he argued, English gardeners needed to work against the particularly English climate and ecological conditions—‘inconsistent weather speeding or retarding the development of a tree or the flowering and seeding of a plant’—cultivars act as they will, die, pop-up or seed unexpectedly, and frustrate the best laid plans.²¹ We must also consider that gardens are also especially prone to adaptation: when land changes hands, or as Dixon Hunt writes, in response to changing public use (when ‘farmland becomes a garden or park’ or a ‘private estate becomes a public amenity under the National Trust’); when funds run out or fashions

¹⁸ W. J. T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994), p. 1.

¹⁹ Russell Page, *The Education of a Gardener* (New York: Random House, 1983), p. 46.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 47; p. 48.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

change and polite taste sweeps away one established style for another.²² Unless acquired for public use, it is highly unlikely that a garden will persist onwards as it was. Those that are restored by bodies like the Trust require their being recognised as of potentially national cultural importance: an eventuality likely to occur only in retrospect to properties of canonically “important” cultural figures. Such considerations complicate the making of garden histories, and frustrate any gardener’s attempts at permanence, and yet they can also be considered as part of the attraction of garden self-placing.²³

It appears to be this lack of finality that contributes so seductively to the modern making of garden narratives. On the one hand, gardening can be considered an eminently hopeful act: to trust in the providence of earth, to wait for what will grow and mature over time—to hope, despite evidence to the contrary, that one’s cultivations may persist. However, we can also consider that such schemes, precisely maintained, appear to temporarily materialise a kind of time stoppage—at least as long as the idyll can be held, and crucially do so in the face of the ultimate ephemerality of such acts. Page’s rhetoric sits within a modern tradition of garden designers and writers fascinated with the strange access provided by this dynamic. ‘Such as it is today’, one *Country Life* reviewer noted of the interwar gardens at the Tudor-built West Horsley Place, Surrey, ‘one feels sure it was in the old days’.²⁴ Back at the close of the nineteenth century, J. D. Sedding, author of the popular 1895 *Garden Craft Old and New*, had similarly mused that the historic garden appeared to offer another strangely transient glimpse into the past. These older gardens, maintained from years gone by, could ‘render into tangible shapes old moods of mind that English landscape has inspired’: an imagined access that signals to ‘man’s happy tillage of his plot of ground’, all the while hinting to ‘passingness’.²⁵ The well-kept garden might let ‘seasons slip by

²² As an example, Dixon Hunt references the eighteenth-century fashion for the landscape garden, ‘when (crudely speaking) the so-called “formal” garden of Europe in the Renaissance and seventeenth century was displaced by the “informal” world of “English” or “Picturesque” landscaping’ (John Dixon Hunt, ‘A Note on Adaption in Gardens’, *Change Over Time*, 2 (2012), 188-200 (p. 189).

²³ and certainly the researching of them!

²⁴ G. C. Taylor, ‘Gardens Old and New: West Horsley Place – III Surrey The Seat of the Marquess of Crewe’ *Country Life*, 8 April 1939, pp.354-358 (p. 356).

²⁵ J. D. Sedding, *Garden Craft Old and New* (London: Kegan Paul, 1895), p. 4.

unawares’ as ‘the year’s passing-bell is ignored’; with labour, ‘the pathos of dead boughs and mouldering leaves’ might be masked by ‘steady brightness’ and ‘fresh counterfeit of permanence’, but any access offered by the garden was nevertheless the result of an ‘abortive effort’ and a ‘paradox which mocks whilst it comforts’.²⁶ And we are also brought back to Ford’s introductory comment that ‘the country seems to offer us’ not just a chance, but a ‘*mirage*, of attaining, each one of us, to his ideal’.²⁷ The countryside might offer sustenance and solace, and the country garden therefore that way of getting close to that personal ideal, but this impulse also might be considered built on fallacious reasoning. In *The Heart of the Country*, Ford would suggest so, considering that “‘The Country’” gives ‘neither composure nor good health, those illusions that are our daily bread’, perhaps only offering the relief that with the ‘sudden movement of the hop tendrils’ ‘we are no longer alone in a dead world’.²⁸ What, then, was the point?

The point was the process—of pushing anyway, to materialise a personal idyll made all the more necessary by a sense of the changes to old rural England. The visibility of such cultural change made the paradoxical, personal garden idyll mirror even more explicitly those wider processes of trying to remodel and preserve English landscape. We can find similarities in this recognition of garden “flux” and “abortive” attempt at permanence in the language immediately familiar to canonical studies of modernity—Marshall Berman’s insistence, for instance, that ‘to be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises [...] growth and transformation of ourselves and the world’ as it ‘threatens to destroy everything we have’.²⁹ There is something uncannily suggestive in Berman’s metaphorical recourse to botanical growth here; something that seems to lead us down the garden path to consider other, more literal possibilities of growth in the face of loss—places, like the country garden, in which to be modern and to also reappraise tradition and history. As I argue, the garden does not just appear

²⁶ Ibid., p. 7; p. 4.

²⁷ My emphasis, Ford, *Heart of the Country*, p. 32.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 32.

²⁹ Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air*, (London: Verso, 2010), p. 15.

metaphorically emblematic of such relations, but could be used to actively cultivate landscapes and traditions under threat. We might then move from modernity to modernism—that most frequently typified response to the “shock” of twentieth-century culture, and Malcom Bradbury and James McFarlane’s classic determination that modernist literature was besieged by the sense that ‘all frontiers were in dangerous and vital flux’.³⁰ Here too is an uncanny similarity—this time, to Page’s definition of English gardening, where flux is both a challenge and yet also simultaneously vital. This is not a thesis about gardens within modernism, or within Art Nouveau, or literary Impressionism—or, indeed, within any other movement—and yet the gardens in this thesis all respond to a deep sense of cultural instability, and do so in new and modern ways, engaging profoundly with the arts and their function in understanding English countryside. By centring on five different figures providing their own, separate artistic innovations within the period, I provide a glimpse into a wider, sustained cultural engagement with the place of literature, the place of art, and the place of the garden in modern rural England. For the figures in this thesis, these places invariably overlapped.

Digging into garden history: Critical and Contextual Frameworks

In reading the modern garden and its formative influences, I combine a range of approaches from allied disciplines, from literary, art and cultural criticism to garden history, as well as drawing upon contexts explored within geographical and rural studies disciplines. It is now not controversial to state the interrelation of places both literary and geographical; to dwell on literary attachments to both ‘words and the world’—attachments that demonstrate a sustained desire for a ‘rooting’ or ‘grounding’ in place.³¹ It is also undeniably valuable to consider the way texts ‘negotiate’ with places and places with texts, how

³⁰ Malcom Bradbury, James McFarlane (eds.). *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 13.

³¹ Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (London: Picador, 2000), p. 23.

place can both inform and be informed by its cultural representations, and how place can provide the loci within which key individuals come together and new movements are born.³² And yet, despite the presence of a rich culture-wide engagement both with the country garden and the make-up of English countryside, the garden nevertheless remains a critically underexamined context within literary historical studies of the period. It is a lack I aim to remedy, opening up modern literary critical studies of modern gardens to wider disciplinary approaches to landscape.

In the 2010 *Romantic Moderns*, Alexandra Harris argued that ‘for all their growing status as a subject of study, gardens get short shrift in histories of the arts’: ‘rarely’ do the names of key period designers appear in relation to such figures as ‘Eliot or Woolf or Piper’.³³ Not enough has changed, especially with regards to work that pays close attention to the approaches of garden history, which privileges attention to the design, tending and inhabitation of gardens as spaces of personal, cultural and social value in their own right; to reading gardens within the contexts of garden historical debate; and to reading the garden as it does representations of the garden to unpick its broader relevance to the arts. This critical absence is brought into sharp focus when we consider that the early twentieth century was not just a period of experimentation across the arts, but also saw the institution of a modern gardening culture: a modern push to determine garden historical narratives, and to determine an appropriate “national” gardening style.

The dominant trends of elite garden design had seen particular upheaval over the nineteenth century. The popular high-Victorian fashion for formal, geometrical carpet bedding had acted as an aesthetic rebellion against the previous century’s faux-natural landscape garden; but was itself to be displaced at the end of the nineteenth century by a return to “wilder” style influenced by vernacular

³² Cheryll Glofelty, *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. by Cheryll Glofelty and Harold Fromm (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996).

³³ Alexandra Harris, *Romantic Moderns: English Writers, Artists and the Imagination from Virginia Woolf to John Piper* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2010), p. 228.

landscape.³⁴ The Edwardian garden is frequently considered a high-point in modern design: generally critically typified by the trend, monopolised in large part by Jekyll and frequent partner architect Edwin Lutyens, to match a formal layout (taking influence both from the gardens of the Italian Renaissance and the rural seats of seventeenth-century England) with informally exuberant planting.³⁵ Nevertheless, this “typical” style, frequently retroactively associated with the Arts and Crafts Movement, was itself the site of repeatedly contested deliberations on appropriate style: competing design agendas proposed by the “Wild Gardening” camp, spearheaded most memorably by Robinson in *The Garden* (founded 1871); and by the formal camp, headed most vocally by architect Reginald Blomfield.³⁶ The garden was never a neutral site, but rather a battleground for heady debates about the aesthetics and the cultivation of English style: debates which began at home. And these debates were by no means isolated to garden design: rather, the rhetorical position of “England as a garden” was a provocatively nationalist theme taken up across popular culture. In 1911, Rudyard Kipling would crystallise this rhetoric with his metaphorical positioning of ‘Our England’ as ‘a garden’ ‘Of borders, beds and shrubberies and lawns and avenues’—defining nationality through a recourse to the traditional signifiers of the country house garden.³⁷ This glorious garden nation, he argues, was maintained by hard work (‘Our England is a garden, and such gardens are not made / By singing:—“Oh how beautiful!” and sitting in the shade’).³⁸ Imploring the nation’s citizens to get to work, Kipling invokes the image of the English garden idyll as metaphorical prompt for an appropriately functioning society, ‘For the Glory of the Garden glorifieth every one’.³⁹

³⁴ See Brent Elliott, *Victorian Gardens* (Portland: Timber Press, 1986); see also David Stuart, *The Garden Triumphant: A Victorian Legacy* (London: Viking, 1981).

³⁵ David Ottewill, *The Edwardian Garden* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989); Helmreich; Brent Elliott’s *The Country House Garden: From the Archives of Country Life 1897-1939* (London: Mitchell Beazley, 1995); Jane Brown, *Gardens of a Golden Afternoon: The Story of a Partnership, Edwin Lutyens and Gertrude Jekyll* (London: Allen Lane, 1982).

³⁶ See Helmreich for an in-depth discussion about how these competing camps can be seen as competing to situate a national garden style for the twentieth century.

³⁷ Rudyard Kipling, ‘The Glory of the Garden’, in *Sixty Poems* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1939), pp. 38-40 (p. 38).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

Kipling's poem offers an immediate introduction to the popular power of the garden as a capacious site ripe for narrative transformation, and as a form through which to imagine wider cultural ideals.

Kipling was writing in the wake of a rapid increase in a popularised national garden culture, saturating through publications like Edward Hudson's *Country Life* (founded 1897), and a progressive range of "Garden Books" —many by Jekyll—accompanied by watercolour illustrations or photography, and straying from the semi-autobiographical to the planting guide, the historic garden, and back again.⁴⁰ In tandem with the popularisation of gardening literature lay the distinct effort to categorise and narrate the "English Garden". In the preface of the third edition of Evelyn Cecil's *A History of Gardening in England* (1910) (according to the author, 'the only work of reference', that reviewed at the time of publishing the historical development of the modern garden), Cecil references the 'extraordinary rapidity' of the growth of garden texts between the second and third publications of her text, tied to 'a very great revival of gardening in England'.⁴¹ '[F]or every book on the subject that came out in 1895, she continues, 'a dozen appeared in 1905'.⁴² Garden periodicals had also continued to bloom with propensity, and there were the big watercolour productions.⁴³ Helen Allingham rendered humble cottage facades choking in flora for an audience willing to pay; garden watercolourist George Elgood made a living promoting the

⁴⁰ Beverley Seaton provides a select bibliography of a range of these texts (characterised as 'garden autobiographies'): see Seaton, 'An Annotated List of English and American Victorian Garden Autobiographies', *The Journal of Garden History*, 4 (1984), 386-398 (p. 386); see also Seaton, 'The Garden Autobiography', *The Gardens Trust*, 7 (1979), 101-120. For studies on the nineteenth-century gardener's guide, see Sarah Bilston, Grace Kehler, 'Gertrude Jekyll and the Late-Victorian Garden Book: Representing Nature-Culture Relations', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 35 (2007), 617-633; Sarah Bilston, 'Queens of the Garden: Victorian Gardeners and the Rise of the Gardening Advice Text', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 36 (2008), 1-19; Sarah Dewis, *The Loudons and the Gardening Press: A Victorian Cultural Industry* (London: Routledge, 2016).

⁴¹ Cecil argued that her text provided the only study of the 'consecutive changes that [had] taken place', 'the fashions which [had] prevailed', and 'the process of development which [had] gradually led up to the modern garden'. (p. vii).

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. vii.

⁴³ In addition to the birth of *Country Life*, 1897 alone boasted 'two volumes each of the *Gardener's Chronicle* (870 pages), the *Journal of Horticulture* (1200 pages)' and the aforementioned *The Garden* (970 pages), as well as 'one volume each of *Gardening World* (800 pages), *Gardener's Magazine* (820 pages), *Gardening Illustrated* (700 pages), and *Amateur Gardening* (500 pages)', not forgetting additional specialist titles or the *Journal of the Royal Horticultural Society* (Brent Elliott, *The Country House Garden*, p. 7); for a bibliography of Victorian gardening magazines, see also Ray Desmond, 'Victorian Gardening Magazines', *Garden History*, 3 (1977), 47-66.

bursting formal schemes of the High-Victorian estate across Fine Art Society exhibitions and the tremendously popular *Some English Gardens*; Ernest Arthur Rowe's colour plates were flaunted in *Studio's The Gardens of England* (1907-1911).⁴⁴ And then there were the publishing enterprises, like Hudson's Country Life Books—designed to collect and re-circulate tasteful catalogues of English garden idylls to the wealthy.⁴⁵ These promoted idylls were part of the wider effort to define and canonise English garden style, and contributed to a richly-signifying, and at first perhaps a surprising additional context to the arts of modern England. With such contexts sketched out, we begin to wonder at the lack of influence literary criticism has taken from such places.

Harris' canonical modernists have been progressively read as taking influence from more generally characterised gardens, with Virginia Woolf's interactions with the garden made by husband Leonard Woolf at the Sussex Monk House now a frequent subject for analysis.⁴⁶ Developing upon the recent critical interest in Woolf's textual gardens, Karina Jakubowicz has provided a detailed study of the influence of garden spaces on her work, considering how her gardens are not scenic 'backdrops' but rather 'integral' to the development of her ideas.⁴⁷ Within Woolf's texts, gardens, Jakubowicz argues,

⁴⁴ For Allingham, see Pamela Gerrish Nunn, 'The Cottage Paradise', *Victorian Review*, 36 (2010), 185-202; Anne Helmreich, 'The Marketing of Helen Allingham: the English Cottage and National Identity', in *Gendering Landscape Art*, ed. by Steven Adams and Anna Gruetzner Robins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 45-60; for the Edwardian garden watercolour more generally, see Penelope Hobhouse and Christopher Wood, *Painted Gardens: English Watercolours 1850-1914* (London: Pavilion, 1995); Jane Brown, *The Pursuit of Paradise: A Social History of Gardens and Gardening* (London: Harper Collins, 2000); Brent Elliott, 'Gardens Illustrated', in *Art of the Garden: The Garden in British Art, 1800 to the Present Day*, ed. by Nicholas Alfrey, Stephen Daniels and Martin Postle (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), pp. 40-47.

⁴⁵ These texts, as Elliott summarises, included the three volumes of *Gardens Old and New* to E.T. Cook's *Gardening for Beginners* (1901); 1913's *Rock and Water Gardens*, by F. W. Meyers; Montagu Allwood's *Carnations* (1926); Frances Perry's *Water Gardening* (1938); and Jekyll's *Garden Ornament*, first published 1918 and revised for a second edition with Christopher Hussey in 1927 (Elliott, 1995, p. 9).

⁴⁶ Albeit less so in conjunction with the garden designers and contexts of the time, although we do now see some gesturing to these contexts. See Nuala Hancock, *Charleston and Monk's House: The Intimate House Museums of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012); Caroline Zoob, *Virginia Woolf's Garden: The Story of the Garden at Monk's House* (London: Jacqui Small, 2013).

⁴⁷ Karina Jakubowicz, 'Gardens in the work of Virginia Woolf' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University College London, 2017), p. 28; see pages 31-34 for an interesting bibliographical summary of the range of critical responses to gardens, flowers and nature in Woolf's work. See also Nuala Hancock, *Gardens in the Work of Virginia Woolf* (London: Cecil Woolf, 2005).

become a way to ‘access space as a stylistic or thematic construct’, meaning that they are not ‘gardens in the literal sense’ but rather ‘a way of speaking about the spaces beyond’.⁴⁸ Working from modern critical emphases in modernist studies on unpacking the impact of the ‘material practices and places of modernity’; and ecocritical assertions of the value of literary critical considerations of natural places, Jakubowicz’s study rightly insists on reading gardens as physical places with a real and demonstrable effect on aesthetic innovation, considering aspects of Woolf’s style, plot and form.⁴⁹

Whilst such work makes an important start on taking gardens seriously, a central focus on figurative gardens—gardens in texts—privileges a certain trajectory where gardens become most interesting when they are “raised up” in a figure’s work: when they are, in effect, made space-less, and more often than not also separated from the contexts of their making. In a study of Woolf’s gardens this is perhaps more or less inevitable: Jakubowicz considers whether it is inaccurate to describe Woolf as a gardener at all, especially when compared to the keen horticulturalists in her life, like her husband Leonard, and garden writer and co-maker of the Sissinghurst Castle gardens, Vita Sackville West.⁵⁰ In any case, Jakubowicz suggests that Woolf was not particularly engaged in modern gardening discourses, and that it would be misrepresentative to consider her gardens in these context.⁵¹ These factors proved integral to my own selection of artist/writer-gardeners. To think carefully about the rich interconnectedness between the arts and gardening of the period, it was important that each figure in my study demonstrated not a one-way track of taking influence from the garden in their particular aesthetic innovations; but that there was a demonstrable reciprocity between their processes of gardening and art-

⁴⁸ Jakubowicz, p. 30.

⁴⁹ Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, *The Geographies of Modernism*, ed. by Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (London: Routledge, 2005, p. 4; Glofelty, p. xvii; see also Andrew Thacker, *Moving Through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

⁵⁰ Jakubowicz, pp 1-2; this is a caveat key to the study of Woolf’s gardens. See Bonnie Kime Scott, *In the Hollow of the Wave: Virginia Woolf and Modernist Uses of Nature* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), p. 71; Hancock, *Charleston and Monk’s House*, p. 97.

⁵¹ Jakubowicz, p. 30.

making, and that they were all deeply, if differently engaged with gardens as physical sites in their own right.

Jakubowicz's reasoning goes some way to justifying the wider trend of reading figurative and metaphorical gardens in literary studies, like Bonnie Kime Scott's *In the Hollow of the Wave* (2012), which takes an ecocritical focus in the pursuit of "Greening modernism" (with more metaphorical Woolf), followed by further recent critical interest in the relation between modernism and nature with a big N.⁵² Such readings are frequently interested in understanding gardens through nature as sensual prompt, or with strangely impermeable boundaries that challenge "conventional" readings of domestic space: however, whilst they may begin in the garden, they also frequently move soon away from it, not considering how the discourses surrounding art-making and literary innovation also deeply informed the cultures surrounding modern garden design. In any case, I have not found an eco-critical focus particularly useful in thinking about interactions between artistic and gardening cultures of the period. For my purposes, gardens are not really natural, but rather complex sites of cultivation and labour and discourse. They therefore have far more to tell us about culture than nature, and are rich sites for the interrogation of how we think about and form landscapes both literal and metaphorical: sites that both prompt art and literary experiment and provide ways to literally remodel wider countrysides both in and outside of art.⁵³

⁵² Bonnie Kime Scott, p. 10; see also See J. M. McCarthy, *Green Modernism: Nature and the English Novel, 1900-1930* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Kelly Sulzbach, *Ecocriticism in the modernist imagination: Forster, Woolf, and Auden* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Elizabeth Black, *The Nature of Modernism: Ecocritical Approaches to the Poetry of Edward Thomas, T. S. Eliot, Edith Sitwell and Charlotte Mew* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

⁵³ Ecocriticism is a broad critical genre, and it would be reductive to state that it can only tell us about our relationships with the natural world when it also asks many multidisciplinary questions about the environment; however, in my study I want to keep away from thinking about what gardens might tell us about "natural" environments. I do not deny the accuracy of key ecocritical ideas about interconnectedness of inherited ideas about nature and culture; and indeed, a wider project might move outwards to think from the gardens of my study to the natural world. See Bate's *The Song of the Earth*, p. 23; Cheryl Glotfelty, 'Introduction', in *The Ecocriticism Reader* (p. xix). Bate; also Timothy Morton's idea of 'the mesh' in *The Ecological Thought* (2010).

My understanding of landscape derives partially from cultural materialist and new historicist attentions to its social construction through the arts, and in doing so, views the garden as a material form of discourse about what landscape can produce, do, and mean within specific cultural contexts. I am consequently indebted to Raymond Williams' landmark *The Country and the City* (1973), and in particular, to his interpretation of "structures of feeling"—getting at how individuals of a period "lived" the values imposed upon them by a society—and how literary and cultural traditions produce their own histories of country life that run alongside (and often contrary) to lived experience. Premised on the exploration of the polarised cultural roles of "country" and "city", Williams study tracks the inheritance of such ideals from classical literature, through the early modern pastoral and the country house poem, the English georgic to twentieth-century rural writing, demonstrating that literary venerations of country life falsely picture a countryside associated with 'peace, innocence, and simple virtue' against a city of 'noise, worldliness and ambition'—and war.⁵⁴ Each garden in this thesis can be read as engaging with this tradition, Jekyll perhaps the least uncomplicatedly, gardening to return to her sense of early-nineteenth-century Surrey, defined by 'older charms of peace and retirement'.⁵⁵ It would be wrong, however, to not register the presence of ambition in her landscapes, just as it would be wrong to not find in the personal countrysides of each figure the mark of all three factors.

It would also be wrong to read the gardens in this thesis as demonstrating only a superficial engagement with cultural tradition: as I establish, close attention to the ways individuals engaged with the traditions of art and literature reveals sustained interrogations of cultural tradition, and an attention to the social costs of such conditions, that might be read as anticipating Williams' own work. Ford's *Heart of the Country* (a text undiscussed by Williams' study) is itself an early literary examination of the ideals Williams would propose nearly seven decades later—a text that not just tracks through the idea of the townsman's country ideal, but explores the impact of personal impression on how we think about and

⁵⁴ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Penguin, 2016), p. 1; p. 34.

⁵⁵ Jekyll, *Old West Surrey*, p. viii.

appraise country landscapes. The text (which, incidentally, also remains critically underexplored in studies of Ford) should consequently be read as an important cultural document, and a key twentieth-century analysis of the role of the writer in forming modern landscapes; likewise, and as I discuss in my third chapter, Ford's early corpus reappraises literary tradition in order to identify common ills affecting a diachronic rural labouring population. Whilst the post-war Ford was to progressively romanticise the countryside of recent memory, the transition between the pre and post-war Fords also sheds light on the similarly complex processes of cultivating landscape in the wake of war. Likewise, my final chapter demonstrates, as noted, how the country garden provided Warner the impetus to imagine new Marxist possibilities for how landscape could be cultivated, but does so through the considered interrogation of the social costs of literary tradition. Jumping off such sources as Crabbe and Cobbett, Warner retrofitted the genres and references of literary history to cost up the competing political and aesthetic values of the cottage plot. It was her attempt to work towards a socially minded poetics, and it was firmly couched in georgic literary tradition: a revolutionary georgic deeply invested in the population of modern rural England.

The figures in this thesis largely engaged with ideas of English countryside through recourse to literary and art history: consequently, appraising each figure's interpretation of English landscape has also required an appraisal of how they interpreted and transformed its cultural history of (mis)representation. Pastoral and georgic tropes consequently make up a large part of this—particularly for Ford, Carrington, and Warner. Through many of these twentieth-century gardens we find ourselves returned in new ways to the pastoral mechanics of Sidney and Shakespeare—to what John Goodridge has defined as 'a manifestation of an apparently universal, pre-conscious, human desire for an ideal and simple world' of rural plenty that is necessarily both defined against the real demands and conditions of actual living and repeatedly interrupted by them.⁵⁶ Elizabethan pastoral might in many ways be defined as a game—an

⁵⁶ John Goodridge, *Rural Life in Eighteenth-Century English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 3.

illusion, even, like Ford's twentieth-century musings on the promise of country living—and defined by knowing conceits and play-acting.⁵⁷ In Carrington's twentieth-century hands the flirtatious games of early-modern pastoral are interpreted to find gardens ripe for queer sexual suggestion and artistic development, re-placing the traditions of literary history in the modern country garden.

It was never really such a leap: English culture has long drawn clear parallels between gardening and the arts. The garden makes an especially apt site for an examination into interactions between artificial and natural contexts from the Renaissance onwards: but what Stephen Deuchar describes as the eighteenth-century 'elevation of landscape gardening to a polite art, with contributions from painting, architecture, sculpture and literature' set in motion a national, cross-arts gardening culture.⁵⁸ As Mavis Batey succinctly summarised, 'Queen Anne's England suddenly learned that gardening was 'near-akin to Philosophy' when Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, Joseph Addison and Alexander Pope told them in quick succession' to abandon early-modern formal gardening traditions for the "natural" landscape garden.⁵⁹ The garden moved to play an important role in the imaginative contemplation of nature across the arts, and was often likened to complementary forms across the arts. We can point to Addison's infamous likening of landscape garden to 'landskip' painting, and his characterisation of distinct styles of garden design as poetic genres, for just two examples:

I think there are many kinds of Gardening, as of Poetry; Your Makers of Parterres and Flower Gardens are Epigrammatists and Sonneteers in this Art. Contrivers of Bowers and Grotto's, Treillages and Cascades, are Romance Writers.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 3.

⁵⁸ Katherine Myers, 'Ways of Seeing: Joseph Addison, Enchantment, and the Early Landscape Garden', *Garden History*, 41(1) (2013), 3-20 (p. 3); see also Dixon Hunt's *Garden and Grove*; Stephen Deuchar, 'Foreword', in *Art of the Garden: The Garden in British Art, 1800 to the Present Day*, ed. by Nicholas Alfrey, Stephen Daniels and Martin Postle (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), p. 7.

⁵⁹ Mavis Batey, 'The Pleasures of the Imagination: Joseph Addison's Influence on Early Landscape Gardens', in *Garden History*, 33 (2005), 189-209 (p. 189).

⁶⁰ Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, No. 387, in Myers, p. 6; and Addison's No. 477, in Myers, p. 9.

It was a connection furthered by the historic traditions of the picturesque, that ‘eighteenth-century desire to find or create natural scenes worthy of picturing’ that was closely linked to the genesis of the landscape garden, and which trickled through Ruskin and Turner to Jekyll and her twentieth-century contemporaries, like Christopher Hussey’s *The Picturesque: Studies in a Point of View* (1927).⁶¹ And the georgic also has a long history in the garden, with its emphases on seasonal labours, and where the well-tended plot can signal more widely to the well-managed state or nation: indeed, Kipling’s glorious stately English garden (and the wider cultural ideal of the English garden itself) should be read within georgic tradition.⁶² It is a tradition that has recently been read as of continued importance to unpicking twentieth-century characterisations of rural life, work, and landscape, inspiring a wealth of new studies interested in crossovers between the period’s agriculture, soil cultures, and literature—although the garden georgic still remains understudied, a problem I hope to begin to solve.⁶³

Despite this rich nexus of cultural response, Williams is particularly damning about the misrepresentative effect of twentieth-century rural writing on how rural landscape remains popularly understood. This countryside, he suggests, was governed not by ‘land but of capital’; and distorted by an ‘uncritical, abstracting, literary anthropology’ made up from a ‘part-imagined, part-observed rural

⁶¹ Rachel Teukolsky, *The Literate Eye: Victorian Art Writing and Modernist Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 31; Dixon Hunt notes that the Reverend Gilpin’s first recorded ‘use of the term *picturesque* in 1748 had been in front of a set of contrived garden “ruins” at Stowe (*Gardens and the Picturesque*, p. 179).

⁶² We might even consider the horticultural advice of the classical examples of georgic as tracing an intriguing lineage from antiquity to the modern gardening advice text. See also Alexandra Harris, ‘Turning, Flying: The Rural Year’, in *A History of English Georgic Writing*, ed. by Paddy Bullard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 57-78; Stephen Bann, ‘The Garden of England: Themes and Variations’, in *Art of the Garden: The Garden in British Art, 1800 to the Present Day*, ed. by Nicholas Alfrey, Stephen Daniels and Martin Postle (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), pp. 49-55.

⁶³ Jeremy Diaper’s work on T. S. Eliot and depleting soil cultures is an excellent example, jumping off from the georgic to demonstrate how Eliot held a ‘prominent place within the British organic husbandry movement’ (Diaper, *T. S. Eliot and Organicism* (Clemson: Clemson University Press, 2018), p. 5); see Paul Brassley, ‘Twentieth-Century Georgic and Agricultural Technology’, in *A History of English Georgic Writing*, ed. by Paddy Bullard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 99-120. Vita Sackville-West is the main critical focus of garden-centred twentieth-century georgic writing: see Juan Christian Pellicer, ‘Twentieth-Century Georgic: Vita Sackville-West’, in *A History of English Georgic Writing*, ed. by Paddy Bullard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 235-254 (particularly pp. 246-249).

England’ defined through continued recourse to such conventions as the pastoral and the georgic.⁶⁴ It was a way of conceptualising the countryside Williams defines as moving ‘at times grossly, at times imperceptibly, from record to convention and back again, until these seem inextricable’, influenced by a ‘conscious contrast’ between a modern, mechanised life and a lazily understood rural simplicity and vitality.⁶⁵ He aptly summarised that the period demonstrated ‘almost an inverse proportion between the relative importance of the rural economy and the cultural importance of rural ideas’—a summary corroborated by even a cursory look into the period’s agricultural conditions.⁶⁶ Statistics from century’s open validate contemporary anxieties regarding national demographic changes. The 1901 census revealed an urban England, with only 23% of the population of England and Wales living in rural areas (a 12% decline over the past decade); only 11.5% of working men were now employed in agriculture.⁶⁷ It was the latest in a series of progressive depopulations.⁶⁸ This decrease has been read as a consequence of the late-nineteenth-century agricultural depression, commonly considered a result of the importation of cereals from abroad at low cost, causing the progressive devaluation of British crops and consequent unemployment and wage instability for agricultural labourers.⁶⁹ By 1914, and the outbreak of war, imports made up 80% of Britain’s wheat: a potential for calamity when the future of such imports could not be guaranteed.⁷⁰ To avoid ‘disaster’, the War Emergency Committee of the Royal Agricultural Society of England voiced the need to produce ‘all the food possible here—now and at once’.⁷¹ Whilst

⁶⁴ Williams, p. 370; p. 375.

⁶⁵ Williams, p. 375; p. 362.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 375.

⁶⁷ Alun Howkins, *The Death of Rural England, A Social History of the Countryside since 1900* (London: Routledge), p. 8.

⁶⁸ See *Ibid.*; Howkins, *Reshaping Rural England: A Social History, 1850-1925* (London: Routledge, 2021) p. 172; E. J. T. Collins, *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, Volume VII 1850-1914, Part II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁶⁹ Howkins, p. 9; for a study of how these contexts make their way into fine art, see also Christiana Payne’s *Toil and Plenty: Images of the Agricultural Landscape in England, 1780-1890* (New Haven: Yale Agrarian Studies Series, 1993).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 24; for a compelling study on the wartime agricultural efforts, see Keith Grieves’ ‘War Comes to the Fields: Sacrifice, Localism and Ploughing Up the English Countryside in 1917’, in *1917: Beyond the Western Front*, ed. Ian Beckett (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 159-176.

⁷¹ Caroline Dakers, *The Countryside at War, 1914-1918* (London: Constable, 1987), p. 14; also Grieves, p. 159. For a comprehensive survey of key agrarian contexts, see Edith H. Whetham (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, VIII, 1914-1939 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

this push for localised food production might have temporarily brought a measure of (relative) labour security for those on the home front, the interwar period saw further, deep instability for workers who were again faced with ‘low pay and irregular work’.⁷² In such a context, Williams saw twentieth-century cultural misrepresentations of rural landscape as ‘the damage which can never be forgotten’.⁷³

Whilst the role of literary and artistic traditions in fashioning the twentieth-century countryside remains an essential part of my analysis, leaning too hard on Williams can also cause us to over-emphasise his dichotomy between country and city. This dichotomy can be read as contributing to canonical critical discourses that also predominantly separates “modern” and modernist innovations from the conscious turn towards (mythologised) cultures along urban/rural lines.⁷⁴ Williams might consequently be read as flattening out the possibility that we can be modern in the country garden at all: an idea that my thesis demonstrates as demonstrably false, despite each figure’s considered engagement in literary and artistic heritages. Despite the importance of drawing out the social costs and fictions unpinning popular understandings of rural life, reading these narratives only in the terms of their self-consciously radical potentials; or, as is characteristic of Williams’ appraisal of much twentieth-century rural writing, reading these narratives for their social limitations, precludes an in-depth understanding of the make-up of a far more varied corpus of modern responses to rural life. Such concerns have been recently raised in reappraisals of early-twentieth-century rural writing, with Paddy Bullard considering the lasting critical impact of Williams’ summation of George Sturt’s *The Wheelwright’s Shop* (1923) —a text memorialising the traditions of rural vernacular craft in England, held up as a crucial cultural account in F. R. Leavis and Denys Thompson’s *Culture and Environment* (1933). Under Williams, Bullard writes,

⁷² Stephen Hussey, ‘Low Pay, Underemployment and Multiple Occupations: Men’s Work in the Interwar Countryside’, *Rural History*, 8 (1997), 217-235 (p. 220); see also Howkins, *The Death of Rural England*, particularly pages 27-54. Of marked impact to the farm labourer was the temporary institution of the County Wage Boards (from 1917) and a minimum agricultural wage of 25s.—this was abandoned in the interwar period (p. 35).

⁷³ Williams, p. 371.

⁷⁴ See Jakubowicz, p. 28; also Dominic Head, *Modernity and the English Rural Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 3; Jed Esty, *The Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

Sturt's text is relegated from its previous cultural positioning as a 'precious document of a kind of English vernacular community that had faded away within living memory' to become representative only of that uncritical literary anthropology raising fiction to the status of fact.⁷⁵ Bullard rightly asserts the importance of re-appraising Sturt's approach to thinking through, and memorialising the cultures of modern rural England (and attempting to do so by coming towards an authentic way of understanding and expressing the local relations between communities).⁷⁶

A close attention to the constitution of such accounts of rural life need not negate an attention to how such accounts also contributed to popular misunderstandings of rural life. This is a critical approach also foregrounded in David Matless' *Landscape and Englishness* (1998, expanded 2016), concerning the stretch between 1918 and the 1950s where, Matless argues, our contemporary assumptions about English landscape took place. Matless signals the 'powerful historical connection between landscape, Englishness, and the modern' that challenges readings of historically minded cultivations of place as solely nostalgic and conservative: labelling cultural phenomena thus, he continues, has the danger of reproducing the 'slackness it purports to diagnose'.⁷⁷ Such considerations are particularly essential in the study of those more conservative figures, like Jekyll, who used her gardens to cultivate a socially limited vision of an ideal Surrey countryside: however, her narratives about this ideal rural countryside were also the basis for a successful career at the forefront of garden design, with clients, like Roger Fry, at the forefront of modernist artistic expression. Whilst it is important to consider what is left out in idealised presentations of landscape (and to dig into the narrative strategies by which landscape becomes "ideal"), it is a critical disservice to not consider in-depth exactly how these strategies permeate across modern culture.

⁷⁵ Paddy Bullard, 'Restoring the Wheelwright's Shop', *The Journal of Modern Craft*, 13 (2020), 161-178 (pp. 161-162).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

⁷⁷ David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London: Reaktion Books, 2016), p. 31; p. 35.

My research should therefore be based within the rich critical tradition aiming towards excavating the complex relations between rural England and modern forms of expression. Whilst classic collections like *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia* (1989) have continued Williams' attention to detangling fiction from truth, considering the indefatigable persistence of "historic" rural idylls returning one to 'a series of fictitious and cloudless infantile summers' (such nostalgic visions of rural life, Christopher Shaw and Malcom Chase argued, tell 'us about the present' through their 'falsification of the past') they also importantly signalled to how such visions are often implicit within media concerned with modernity.⁷⁸ There is now a wealth of recent scholarship rightly insisting on not assuming twentieth-century rural landscapes (and twentieth-century art about rural landscapes) as necessarily "anti-modern".⁷⁹ As Dominic Head puts it, the persistence of the rural tradition in interwar English novels alone offers a 'telling response to modernity'—all the more so for 'its obliquity'.⁸⁰ For Head, the rural novel becomes a place where an attention to the traditions of rural life is felt in variously interrogative and resuscitative ways.

Key work has also moved to further problematise that critical positioning that places the rural alongside the conservative and the anti-modern, positioned against the urban and the modern. Two particularly essential studies in this vein include Jed Esty's *The Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture* (2004) and Harris' *Romantic Moderns*: both insisting upon the relevance of rural England to late modern(ist) experiment. Esty's formative study concentrates on what he defines as the 'anthropological turn': a movement, within the thirties and forties of canonical modernists like Woolf and T. S. Eliot, away from the more metropolitan concerns of "high modernism" towards rural matters.⁸¹ He

⁷⁸ Christopher Shaw and Malcom Chase, 'The Dimensions of Nostalgia', in *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989) 1- 17 (p.1; p.6); see also Alun Howkins' *The Death of Rural England*.

⁷⁹ Including Esty; Head; Harris; Ysanne Holt, *British Artists and the Modernist Landscape* (London: Ashgate, 2003); Rosemary Shirley, *Rural Modernity, Everyday Life and Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 2015); Kirsten Bluemel and Michael McCluskey (eds.), *Rural Modernity: A Critical Intervention* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018); Jane Stevenson, *Baroque Between the Wars: Alternative Style in the Arts, 1913-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Frances Spalding, *The Real and the Romantic: English Art Between Two World Wars* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2022).

⁸⁰ Head, p. 2; p. 3.

⁸¹ Esty, p. 3

links this “turn” to the twentieth-century decline of the English imperial powers, using the motif of the shrinking island to categorise a cultural ‘retrenchment’ away from ‘metropolitan perception’ towards a newly insular and nationalist interest in rural tradition felt across the literature of late modernism.⁸² On the other hand, Harris concentrates instead on cross and extra-canonical thirties and forties investments in reclaiming English rural tradition from the horrors of war through texts, images, spaces and objects, defining modern romanticism following John Piper’s connection of the term with an interest in the particular in landscape.⁸³ For Harris, the turn towards English landscape is not seen so much as a “retrenchment” than as a way to reconcile and reconstruct forms of national identity by returning to past traditions: a task as much for “high” art as for wider impulses across culture, in an important challenge to the types of work we consider “modern”.

There are limitations to Esty’s conception of the anthropological turn: in particular that it replicates Williams’ dichotomy, and in doing so follows a primary urban modernism with a secondary rural one. In *Reimagining the Place of English Modernism* (2015), Sam Wiseman moves back a decade to the twenties, moving to find both ‘a profound sense of attachment to rural place and traditions with an equally powerful interest in modernity’ in the novels of D. H. Lawrence, John Cowper Powys, Mary Butts and Woolf.⁸⁴ Wiseman both extends the critical timeline for the anthropological turn, as well as working to counter Esty’s implications that work about rural matters was somehow divorced from the ‘cosmopolitan sensibilities’ informing earlier work: rather than being ‘abandoned’, he argues, these sensibilities were ‘transmuted into new ways of depicting landscape, flora and fauna’.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, work still needs to be done to diversify critical conceptualisations of “modern” responses to landscape across the arts.

⁸² Esty, p. 3.

⁸³ Harris, *Romantic Moderns*, p. 14.

⁸⁴ Sam Wiseman, *The Reimagining of Place in English Modernism* (Clemson: Clemson University Press, 2015), p. 2.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

Firstly, it is important to expand the scope of critical discussion beyond concentrating predominantly on the interwar and post-war periods. This is not to negate the mammoth impact of the Great War across all cultural seams; rather, the persistence of the suggestive power of the gardenised signifiers of rural England to wartime society suggests their importance as a continuing thread, and not just as part of an anthropological turn. Wartime cultural gardening efforts were not just directed towards food production, but towards the continued cultivation of the national garden ideal—and “saving” the wider rural English landscape they were made part of was promoted as both reasons for soldiers to enlist, and to keep up morale at the Front.⁸⁶ The RHS published guides on domestic food production as well as sending decorative flora to French field hospitals; and in recognition of the war’s impact on horticulture, they also created a relief fund for Allied horticulturalists in French and Belgium (raising circa £45,000).⁸⁷ Gardening was therefore read as recuperative, but also continued to be seen as a mark of national pride: for one example, there was the Ruhleben Horticultural Society at the wartime German internment camp for English citizens, endorsing the gardening of barracks and common areas at the camp (‘No self-respecting Town Council in England is without its Parks and Gardens Committee; surely in Ruhleben, too, some public energy, and public funds, could be devoted to beautifying the Camp?’ argued the *Ruhleben Camp Magazine* in 1916).⁸⁸ The RHS promoted the society’s efforts in the British press, and seeds were supplied from Carter’s, Suttons, Barr & Sons, and the head gardener at Belvoir Castle.⁸⁹ The

⁸⁶ Keith Grieves and Jennifer White, ‘Useful War Memorials, Landscape Preservation and Public Access to the English Countryside: Fitting tributes to the Fallen of the Great War’, *Garden History*, 42 (2014), pp. 18-33 (p. 19); see also Grieves’ on local methods of paternalist recruitment in “‘Lowther’s Lambs’”: Rural Paternalism and Voluntary Recruitment in the First World War’, *Rural History*, (1993) 4, 55-75.

⁸⁷ Elliott, ‘A Tale of Two Societies: the Royal Horticultural Society and the Ruhleben Horticultural Society’, in *Occasional Papers from the RHS Lindley Library*, 12 (London: The Royal Horticultural Society, 2014), pp. 31-76 (p. 31; p. 32); see also Brent Elliott, ‘The Royal Horticultural Society’s War Relief Fund, 1914-1920’, *Garden History*, 42 (2014), 107-117.

⁸⁸ Michael Pease in Brent Elliott, ‘A Tale of Two Societies’, p. 41; see also Michael Stibbe, *British Civilian Internees in Germany: the Ruhleben Camp, 1914-1918* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008); Sue Barnard, ‘Planting the Seed of Horticulture at Ruhleben Internment Camp, near Berlin, Germany, 1914-1918’, *Garden History*, 42 (2014), 11-132.

⁸⁹ Elliott, ‘A Tale of Two Societies’, p. 44. Nevertheless, camp gardening was not only the province of the English: interred German prisoners of war made their own gardens (imprisoned) on British soil, and were put to agricultural

war nevertheless greatly impacted the making and tending of private gardens: whilst the scale of casualties had an inevitable effect on the horticultural workforce, in 1919, C. Fletcher also noted for *British Gardener* that ‘the large private gardens of the past are in the majority of cases not resuming former dimensions’; with gardens of all sizes seeing labour cuts of a proportionate nature.⁹⁰ This labour displacement ensured a comparable wage insecurity as found in the agricultural industry, and a consequent push for gardeners’ trade unionism.⁹¹ Despite this persistent instability, the idylls held fast.

Post-war, those who returned had to reappraise the landscape anew. Periodicals called for national beauty spots to be dedicated to the lost in addition to new constructions; the National Trust’s landholdings increased from six-thousand acres (1915), to twenty-one thousand (1925) in acts of preservation for future generations and remembrance of those passed; *Country Life* encouraged its (often landed) readership to aid the campaign to make new public places for the gardenless to engage in what they might have lost.⁹² 1919 had offered a (briefly) promising future for the value of land after a wartime slump: farms were in demand from those seeking restoration in the land, as were smaller country houses within an hour of London, with record sales recorded. One agent, Knight, Frank & Rutland, recorded over 750,000 acres of land changing hands over the course of the year.⁹³ However rents were soon back on their way down and landowners unable to sell their historic mansions—especially if they possessed extensive grounds—and they were unable to profit from their management alone.⁹⁴ The growing sense of the instability of the English landscape was heightened across the thirties: the building of four million suburban houses was read as further threatening the architectural and gardened signifiers of old

work on local estates. See Elliott, p. 73; also Panikos Panayi, *Prisoners of Britain: German Civilian and Combat Internees during the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012).

⁹⁰ C. Fletcher, ‘Private Gardening’, *British Gardener*, 11 (1919), p. 86.

⁹¹ Brent Elliott provides an intriguing summary of the work of the British Gardener’s Association and its counter-description as garden Bolshevism (Brent Elliott, ‘Bolshevism in the Garden’, *Occasional Papers from the RHS Lindley Library*, 12 (London: The Royal Horticultural Society, 2014), pp. 77-93 (p. 82).

⁹² Keith Grieves and Jennifer White, p. 19; p. 21; p. 24.

⁹³ Adrian Tinniswood, *The Long Weekend: Life in the English Country House Between the Wars* (London: Johnathon Cape, 2016), p. 22.

⁹⁴ Tinniswood, p. 26.

picturesque rural England.⁹⁵ In an attempt at redress, alongside the continuing efforts of The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), first set up by William Morris and Philip Webb in 1877 to counter inappropriate nineteenth-century “restoration”, was the 1926 institution of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England, alongside continued preservational efforts by the National Trust in recognition of the loss of the “Great Country Houses of England”—180 of which, Adrian Tinniswood reports, had been gutted and destroyed between war’s end and 1930.⁹⁶ Post Wall Street crash, further unsaleable country estates flooded the market.⁹⁷ And local threat was matched by international tumult: 1936 was both the year that the Trust set upon the creation of the Historic Country Houses Scheme (it now held fifty thousand acres), and the year Hitler occupied the Rhineland.⁹⁸ Acts of landscaped stock-taking appeared to possess a justified momentum, with the mid-thirties also a time of ‘remedial planting’ intended to offer a ‘palliative’ to the ‘chaos’ of four million new ‘haphazard buildings and ill-conceived new arterial roads’: organisations like the Roads Beautifying Association (1928 - c.1950) and Coronation Planting Committee (1937) attempted to sustain public interest in the cultivation of England.⁹⁹ Such efforts were seen as complimentary to the use of England’s landscape in remembrance of the war dead—like the thirty memorial limes and beeches planted in Buckinghamshire in 1937, to both commemorate ‘the coronation of George VI and to remember the Great War fallen’ as the next war seemed increasingly inescapable.¹⁰⁰

Such contexts elucidate the wide cultural responses to the threat of the loss of the historic signifiers of English countryside, as well as signalling that acts of landscaping were never far away from public efforts to preserve a wider sense of rural English life. Nevertheless, and whilst these later acts should be read as part of a post-war regenerative push for renewal, they should also be read as based

⁹⁵ Spalding, p. 112.

⁹⁶ Tinniswood, p. 30.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁹⁸ Spalding, p. 113.

⁹⁹ Page, p. 32.

¹⁰⁰ Ronald Saunders in Grieves and White, p. 28.

within a longer tradition of response to rural landscape. This thesis began, after-all, with a range of complementary pre-war perspectives from the very beginning of the century; and with a popular culture where landscape, and the garden could never be understood as concepts untouched by political, economic, and social discourse. We saw Jekyll's fears about the impact of the 'unceasing restlessness' of modernity on the continuation of rural life; Sturt's engagement with a new Surrey suburbia (and an increase in (the white-collar) population by three quarters); Masterman's anxiety about the types of locality that would be used to define a modern England; and we were also introduced to a range of more personal histories within landscape—to Ford's pre-war fascination with the *Heart of the Country* (and its importance to the development of literary Impressionism); and to Carrington's first forays into a productive rustic landscape peopled by bronzed ploughboys.¹⁰¹ Each example calls for us to draw longer histories of engagement with modern rural life, and to not treat the interwar period as the predominate source for study: categorising "rural" aesthetic innovation as predominantly a post-war phenomenon might also be read as imposing an essentialising narrative that again begins in the city before moving out to find respite in the country. Read in this way, the power of English landscape as a significant prompt for new and exciting work is reduced, as all of the truly canon-defining work begins in the city, and is only ever really adapted to consider rural life later in the game. Studying a series of artist's and writer's country gardens across a longer time period allows us to diversify our understanding of how, and *where*, experimental ideas were developed.

My interest in diversifying the timeline by which we approach the interrelation of the arts and English landscape feeds into my second call for diversification: that we continue to expand what we categorise as "modern" responses to landscape—and in particular, that we move to consider the garden. This, as noted, is an area of study revitalised in large part by Harris; and built on more recently by additionally wide-ranging and canon-expanding work including Rosemary Shirley's *Rural Modernity, Everyday Life and Visual Culture* (2015), Kristin Bluemel and Michael McCluskey's edited collection

¹⁰¹ Jekyll, *Old West Surrey*, p. vii; Sturt, *Change in the Village*, p. 7.

Rural Modernity: A Critical Intervention (2018); Jane Stevenson's *Baroque Between the Wars: Alternative Style in the Arts, 1913-1939* (2018); and Frances Spalding's *The Real and the Romantic: English Art Between Two World Wars* (2022). Such work continues to make great inroads in moving beyond limiting conceptions of twentieth-century art-making, and in moving beyond modernism: but there is still more to do.

In order to consider in greater depth the relations of modern artistic and gardening cultures, we should look further beyond literary critical disciplines. Art history is often better at considering real garden space: perhaps simply because garden history makes frequent use of garden art to consider the make-up, meaning, and interpretation of historic gardens. Then there is the matter that the art of the garden has long contributed to the design, and cultural reception, of particular styles or sites. Academic garden history has correspondingly progressively incorporated art historical methods, in particular through the adoption of stylistic period grouping and terminology to compare conceptual relationships between gardens and the arts; and garden historians have also contributed to the interpretation of garden art.¹⁰² The 2004 Tate Britain *Art of the Garden: The Garden in British Art, 1800 to the Present Day* was one such cross-disciplinary effort, aiming at pinning down the progressive importance of ideas of the English garden to art from the nineteenth century onwards. In the catalogue's introduction, Nicholas Alfrey, Stephen Daniels, and Martin Postle restated this hunt for definition, questioning 'the place of the garden in British art'.¹⁰³ Compared with other recognisable sites from England landscape, they suggested, like 'hills and woods, towns and villages, rivers and coasts, gardens are not securely bounded by particular artistic traditions and movements'.¹⁰⁴ They fittingly concluded that 'the art of the garden

¹⁰² Brent Elliott, 'The Development and Present State of Garden History', in *Occasional Papers from the RHS Lindley Library*, 9 (London: Royal Horticultural Society, 2012), 3-94 (p. 50).

¹⁰³ Nicholas Alfrey, Stephen Daniels and Martin Postle, 'Introduction', in *Art of the Garden: The Garden in British Art, 1800 to the Present Day*, ed. by Nicholas Alfrey, Stephen Daniels and Martin Postle (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), pp. 9-11 (p. 9).

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

migrates across genres’, although their own scope is limited in its application to the paintings of gardens, rather than the sites in themselves, they nevertheless augment my call for an interdisciplinary approach.¹⁰⁵

Garden history remains a relatively small discipline, emerging in academic contexts only within the last six decades: disciplinary research is published predominantly in the two journals *Garden History* (founded 1972), and *Journal of Garden History* (1981).¹⁰⁶ Here too we can find a discipline-wide call for interdisciplinarity that still needs further answering: in 1999, Dixon Hunt called for ‘a history of the reception or consumption of gardens that acknowledges that they yield as much a dramatic as a discursive experience’—the designed landscape, Hunt continued, needs ‘an addressee’; someone to ‘understand its qualities [...] we need to know how people have responded to sites in word and image’.¹⁰⁷ It is a task I have endeavoured to take on, as well as to consider how the gardens were themselves made in response to “word and image”. More recently, with Edward Harwood, Tom Williamson and Michael Leslie, Dixon Hunt returned to review the role of garden studies across academic disciplines, insisting upon a renewed interdisciplinary attention to garden and landscape history.¹⁰⁸ Reiterating Hunt’s interest in the cultural reception of gardens, Harwood surveyed the applicability of garden history methods to wider studies, suggesting that we might consider the discipline as ‘inherently interdisciplinary’: so much so that it was common to find scholars in disparate disciplines ‘pursue the history of gardens *without* committed work’ to integrating their work in disciplines beyond their own, despite, he continued, ‘the demonstrable importance of those other disciplines for a full understanding of the garden culture or a particular place or

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁰⁶ See Elliott, ‘The Development and Present State of Garden History’, in *Occasional Papers from the RHS Lindley Library*, 9 (London: Royal Horticultural Society, 2012), 3-94 (p. 3); also Edward Harwood, Tom Williamson, Michael Leslie, and John Dixon Hunt, ‘Whither Garden History?’, *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes* 27(2), (2007) 91-112.

¹⁰⁷ John Dixon Hunt, ‘Approaches (New and Old) to Garden History’, in *Perspectives on Garden Histories*, ed. by M. Conan (Washington and DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1999), 77-90 (p. 89).

¹⁰⁸ Dixon Hunt, ‘Introduction’, in Harwood et al, ‘Whither Garden History’, p. 91.

period.¹⁰⁹ Not only can we learn from garden history's approach to landscape, but we need to do better to integrate our work with the aims and methods of allied disciplines.

Nevertheless, there remain limitations in typical garden historical methodologies. Tom Williamson has expressed the need to move beyond the understanding of gardens 'largely through 'a series of styles, which were developed by a few "key" designers at certain "key" sites, and then more widely emulated'; calling for a more careful appraisal of how landscape design 'incorporated, or excluded' the more productive aspects rural country, and of the 'complex ways in which gardens were used by contemporaries, in arenas of social display and recreation, and as statements of social identity—and how these things shaped their form'.¹¹⁰ The interpretation of the gardens of the twentieth century does tend to maintain an emphasis on key figures, key sites, and key styles: readings, for instance, of "The Victorian Garden", the "Edwardian Garden", or "The Arts and Crafts Garden", or centrings on particular designers viewed as especially emblematic of wider cultural taste.¹¹¹ In such a light, and as I discuss in my first chapter, Jekyll's formidable contribution to modern garden history as a leading horticulturalist and designer of over 300 gardens for clients nationally has been the basis for various studies that consider her role in advancing a specific type of Edwardian taste on the gardens of the upper middle class.

These studies prioritise a specific type of garden above all: the gardens of country houses inhabited by the cultural elite, and that are made through the beneficence of patronage or through the hiring of a "name" designer. Such centrings are unsurprisingly common to garden history, where the gardens most likely to be preserved are those emblematic of high cultural capital, but it nevertheless

¹⁰⁹ Harwood, 'One: On the History and Historiography of Gardens', in Harwood et al, 'Whither Garden History', 91-96 (p. 93); see also Michael Leslie, 'Three: "The hard and the soft": Interdisciplinarity and Cultural History in Landscape Studies', in 'Whither Garden History', 103-107.

¹¹⁰ Tom Williamson, 'Two: Societies and landscapes in post-medieval England: Some Problems with Garden History', in Harwood et al, 'Whither Garden History', 96-103 (p. 97; p. 98).

¹¹¹ See, respectively, Elliott's *Victorian Gardens*, Ottewill's *The Edwardian Garden*, and Sarah Rutherford's *The Arts and Crafts Garden*, (Oxford: Shire Publications Ltd., 2013).

limits the wider representativeness of their findings. Even Helmreich's particularly engaging discussion of the importance of the garden to pre-war conceptions of Englishness does so mostly through a central focus on the in-fighting between naturalist and formal design camps made up from name designers. And wider surveys of developing style, like Brent Elliott's invaluable *The Country House Garden: From the Archives of Country Life, 1897-1939* (1995), which highlights key stylistic periods in the gardens of country estates as promoted within the pages of *Country Life*, offer demonstrations of polite taste above all, and are also inevitably limited by the matter that the sites highlighted were all originally judged as in acquiescence with the (shifting) tastes of the periodical. Whilst we can learn much about the garden context of twentieth-century elite taste through such studies, they nevertheless demonstrate predominantly, as Williamson has suggested, 'how a small, highly educated group articulated the changes taking place in the landscapes of the rich'.¹¹² It is therefore worth placing this high-design context within other wider ones, to consider how artists and writers were also making their own private gardens that similarly looked back into history, looked forward into the twentieth century, and thought about English landscape.

Historic garden design, Williamson continued, 'did not merely make reference to a world of "high culture"', and more needs to be done to unpick exactly how 'the symbolism of designed landscapes' usually 'involved the reworking and re-presentation of domestic, vernacular themes, involving agricultural production'.¹¹³ One solution appears to be a concentration on 'the history of particular gardens'—and the specific consideration of the biographies of garden-makers, so as to avoid the potentially flattening and misrepresentative approach of reading a period's gardens as corresponding to a general style or neat characteristic above all.¹¹⁴ Instead, we can consider what specific gardens and their gardeners do, and then move to consider any shared tendencies that emerge when considering these

¹¹² Tom Williamson, 'Garden History and Systematic Survey', in *Garden History: Issues, Approaches, Methods* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1992), pp. 59-78 (p. 59).

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

particular sites in tandem. It is a strategy I have found particularly useful: aiming to read each site, garden, and associated artistic outputs separately in order to attempt to unpick distinct references, aims, and functions, before looking to see what larger narratives emerge. It has allowed me to, I hope, not just provide new ways about thinking about gardens within literature, but also to think about moving towards new approaches to doing garden history.

The gardens in this study might be best considered as vernacular gardens—what Hunt and Joachim Wolshke-Bulmhan have defined as those gardens that do not ‘come into being as a result of the powerful intervention on a site of a patron or “name” designer’.¹¹⁵ Each garden considered here is a personal site made (sometimes very closely) adjacent to the circles and contexts of high-design. I begin in more familiar garden-historical territory, with my study of Jekyll offering a crossover: whilst any Jekyll garden can be considered a “key site” of modern design, I look into her private garden, Munstead Wood, rather than her commissions, as representative of its maker’s tastes and intentions towards modern garden design, and as building narratives that communicate the preservation of a particular portion of her native rural Surrey. However, each following chapter offers a new interpretation of the modern country garden, building up a series of examinations of different ways that the modern country garden was made, used, and conceived in tandem with the arts.

There are inevitable limitations to the ultimate representativeness of my own contribution to Garden history. I may not be centring on the sites and owner-designer relations common to studies of the period, but neither is my study centred purely on the “typical” vernacular garden—on pinning down, for instance, the realities of general cottage garden of the twentieth-century field labourer. Whilst I examine different artists working in different movements producing different contributions to the arts to uncover a shared pull to cultivating rural countryside, my thesis centres on a “small, highly-educated group” of a

¹¹⁵ John Dixon Hunt and Joachim Wolshke-Bulmhan (eds.), *The Vernacular Garden* (Georgetown: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library & Collection, 1995), p. 3.

different kind: (frequently upper) middle-class writers and artists with deep connections to polite and intellectual cultures. Both Jekyll and Mary Watts had connections to landed families, with Watts hailing from gentry in Scotland; both also possessed formal artistic educations, had travelled widely across Europe (in esteemed company), and circulated amongst the pride of late-nineteenth artistic celebrity, from Ruskin and Morris to G. F. Watts and the Royal Academy. Access to such cultural capital was not just essential to their ability to cultivate their own places within modern art, but deeply informed the gardens they made, the histories they told, and the references that informed the garden-narratives emanating from their specially designed country properties. Likewise, whilst Ford may have gardened for sustenance from comparably dilapidated farmsteads and labouring cottages, he too had a rich cultural heritage, having grown up amongst the Pre-Raphaelites, and with an illustrious London-based literary career in the midst of developing modernist poetics. Carrington stands out within the thesis as the lone lower-middle-class figure, but even she moved in cosmopolitan circles at the forefront of modern artistic experiment. Bar Sylvia Townsend Warner, each figure also made their gardens in the Home Counties and the South Eastern countrysides not far from London: there are, therefore, limitations to the types of English landscape depicted across this thesis.¹¹⁶

We cannot expect to glean a comprehensive understanding of the importance of the modern garden from my study; or to offer an even nearly full account of the complex nexus of reciprocal relations occurring between the making of gardens, and the making of modern art within the period. Nevertheless, considering in detail the interrelation of a series of specific gardens within wider design contexts reveals an almost critically untapped subject. By uncovering each separate and yet complementary impulse towards garden self-placing, we can consider in a new light what garden history methodologies have to offer wider studies of the period's literature, art, and culture. We can also call for renewed attention to the

¹¹⁶ See, for instance, Martin J. Weiner's conception of the 'Southern Metaphor' for consideration about what gets left out in predominantly South-Eastern definitions of Englishness; and its particular crystallisations within depictions of English rural life (Martin J. Weiner, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 72.

ways that modern art and literature was invested in how modern rural England looked, functioned, and was understood.

Chapter Summaries

The five chapters of this thesis can consequently be read as offering five distinct yet complementary vignettes illuminating individuals gardening across the arts. My first chapter reads the making and publicising of Jekyll's Munstead Wood as an involved narrative process arguing for the preservation of rural England under her particular aesthetic vision. I begin by unpicking Jekyll's understanding of local Surrey character, considering how her interpretation of vernacular traditions were informed by the aesthetic selection of appropriate signifiers of historic life to "document" for preservation. I then read these strategies into the making of Munstead Wood, examining how processes of localisation (and writing about these localisations) materialised her ideal Surrey landscape for promotion. Finally, I consider how Jekyll's style was taken up and adapted throughout the interwar years, both in continued efforts of memorialising and preserving a historic rural England, and as it mutated into more avant-garde cultures. Jekyll's mission did not change, but her landscapes were also not incompatible with the domestic settings of more "modern" artists: rather, I reveal them to possess a malleable, seductive narrative-making capacity that fit right in with the contemporary push to use landscape to situate, narrate, and preserve threatened heritages.

My second chapter considers Mary Watts' complimentary attempts to cultivate a twinned space and cultural reputation through the garden. Again, Watts' particular aesthetic ethos—the cultivation of a grand pattern of interweaving greens intended to lay out all in symbolism—grounds her own gardening of domestic to artistic spaces; in this instance also providing a vital context to her attempt to maintain relevance in a fast-moving art world. I first lay out the gardening of Limnerslease, considering its

naturalist cultivation of landscaped pattern, before demonstrating how this gardening was extended and promoted in her creation of an Artist's Village—house, pottery, gallery, and chapel. This Artist's Village references the high Victorian culture of the Artist's retreat and the Artist at home to both attempt to maintain George Watts' reputation and establish Mary's own. I then move to consider Mary's Art Nouveau sculptural productions as originating from her landscape—her terracotta gardenware, sculptures and memorial chapel—as occupying their own particular niche in the development of modern sculpture. These Surrey gardens, I argue, proved as essential as Jekyll's own in the self-placing of a career in a fast-changing cultural environment, and made their own narratives with long-lasting heritage: in this case, stretching from Celtic Scots design to the Italian Renaissance, the Victorian art celebrity, and the modern artist's village. Complementing my study of Jekyll's more successful narratives, I offered a distinct picture about how the garden could be taken up and used to hope for a preserved future as the twentieth century, and the art world, moved on.

My third chapter articulates the importance of the country garden both to the development of Ford's literary Impressionism, as well as his attempts at post-war reconstruction in the Sussex countryside. Ford did not make a high-Jekyll herbaceous border, but rather planted modest, vernacular cottage gardens for sustenance: nevertheless, he remained deeply engaged in thinking about the history, meaning, and future of English countryside. I begin by setting up Ford's pre-war engagement in rural cultures, discussing *The Heart of the Country*, his depiction of rural life at the turn of the century, against early poetry and historical fiction. I then move to consider the makeup of his post-war smallholdings, and how, prior to his leaving England for Provence, these landscapes provided a situation from which he attempted to restore self and remember a pre-war culture lost. As I demonstrate, his narratives range from the interwar period to the pre-war period and back again, in repeated memorialisations of lives lost. For Ford, the English country garden was an inheritance that was not ultimately sustainable post great War: he was to live abroad for the remainder of his life. Nevertheless, his memorialisations continue in text, and he cannot leave the landscape behind for good.

Chapter four examines how Dora Carrington used the country garden to narrate a more private landscape: a landscape of retreat from modern life, imbued with rich pastoral reference, and able to sustain intimate, queer companionship. I first analyse Carrington's correspondence to work towards unpacking the dynamics of such a landscape, before considering its construction at Tidmarsh Mill and Ham Spray. Unpicking the construction of Carrington's intimate landscapes, I argue, grounds the development of her painting in her quest to find a home, shared, in the English countryside. Carrington first played up a deliberately "rustic" image at Tidmarsh mill before moving on to cultivate a more classical country at 'her perfect English Country House', Ham Spray.¹¹⁷ The chapter works to both continue reclaiming Carrington's reputation from "provinciality", and to offer another example of how modern artists looked to, and remodelled English landscape in the development of their own modern arts. Carrington's interest in the historic garden's ability to extend out the pastoral moment offers a way to consider how interwar attitudes to country living worked with and continued to transform pre-war attentions to the historicity of English landscape: to push it into new shapes, to queer it, and to reimagine it for different futures still.

My final chapter moves to Dorset, and Warner's interest in the political potential of the cottage garden. Like Carrington, rural landscapes had to provide a safe living for queer companionship; and also like Carrington, Warner plundered cultural history in the construction of her country livings. However, unlike Carrington, Warner's narratives were faced outwards, to remodel local English countryside for a more public good. I trace through Warner's interwar texts, demonstrating how progressively strained political contexts engendered Warner to interrogate traditional methods of representing landscape. As Warner considered what it meant to inhabit a rural country cottage, and then a small country house, as a middle-class poet, I argued that her texts and gardens mirror her workings towards a Marxist

¹¹⁷ Dora Carrington, in Jane Hill, *The Art of Dora Carrington* (London: Herbert Press, 1995), p. 91.

consciousness, considering the continuing social costs of such traditions as the Georgic, pastoral, and picturesque. I suggest that her interwar texts should be considered as a form of garden-based Georgic writing, examining her quest to find an appropriate socialist literature, reappraising as it does the canons of English rural writing. Decades may have passed since Jekyll first determined to make her own Surrey gardens, but Warner's situation at the forefront of literary innovation and new socialist writing demonstrates the critical relevance of the cultivated countryside to the arts. As at the turn of the century, the country garden remained close by: as location, as subject, as narrative.

1 | From Munstead for Good: Design and Document in Jekyll's Surrey

In September 1878, the horticulturalist Gertrude Jekyll made a particularly definitive diary entry: 'to Munstead for good'.¹ She had decided, aged thirty-five, to live alone in West Surrey: a landscape loved from childhood. From 1883 she began to cultivate a fifteen-acre plot of exceptionally poor, sandy soil into her personal garden—the site that would become Munstead Wood. It was a prescient career move, with her gardens going on to prompt international acclaim.² For these gardens were the site from which she constructed cross-arts narratives about her local countryside, moving outwards from her garden: narratives which promoted rural Surrey to argue for the preservation of rural England. They were highly selective, visually imagined, and wont to dwell on picturesque appearance over the realities of working-class life. For Jekyll, the garden was the best medium for the interpretation, and the aestheticisation, of local landscape. Garden design offered Jekyll the opportunity to cultivate landscape to her tastes, and to then argue that those tastes best expressed her impression of Old West Surrey. Nevertheless, whilst she had determined to return to the county for the remainder of her life, her Munstead plot was also to be the model from which she could publicly reimagine an older and more expansive landscape, from, rather than to Munstead, for the apparent good of rural England.

This chapter unpacks the making of Jekyll's gardens, arguing that her vision for Munstead (and so for rural England) derived from her private study of vernacular Surrey landscape, and her aestheticisations of an old and vaguely understood English landscape. I first examine *Old West Surrey* (1904), her "catalogue" of West Surrey landscape, to work to pin down her characterisations of "authentic" local countryside, and to determine the rich, accompanying cultural contexts of national reappraisal Jekyll worked to place herself within. I argue that *Old West Surrey* materialises a deep tension

¹ Gertrude Jekyll in Sally Festing, *Gertrude Jekyll* (London: Viking: 1991), p. 90.

² For a study of Jekyll's influence in the US, see Susan E. Scharne, Rudy J. Favretti, 'Gertrude Jekyll's American Gardens', *Garden History*, 10 (1982), 149-167.

between the need to define, document, and memorialise vernacular tradition, and between the inevitable aestheticisation of the artefacts Jekyll deemed appropriate for documentation. Working to pin down this relationship between documentation and aestheticisation (and working out what was included in Jekyll's characterisation of her local landscape, and what was not) proves a vital context for her garden making, as it demonstrates how she positioned her new designs as continuing that prior heritage extending back into history; and how she could place her work as engaging with complementary projects of historical reappraisal. In particular, I demonstrate that Jekyll's texts depend upon the idealisation of particular "rustic" stock character details that narrate their place within local (and cultural) landscapes. Having established what Jekyll's quasi-historical texts narrate, I then move to consider the comparable processes of narration embodied in the design of Munstead Wood: unpacking the cultivation of a scheme that again, needs to be read as "local". As in text, the emphasis of particular "rustic" stock character details anchor her schemes, assisting her promotion of the gardens as demonstrative of her sense of Old West Surrey.

Jekyll's aesthetic vision for twentieth-century Surrey was one that returned to the first half of the nineteenth century: to the time before the 'many' and 'great' changes she had seen impacting the constitution of modern rural England.³ For Jekyll, the changes of most concern were almost exclusively the loss of the signifiers of an older way of living: the cottages, tools and ways of dress of the early 1800s. Her old Surrey had far more to do with personal myth than reality: an imagined landscape 'undiscovered' by cosmopolitan society; and one characterised by 'older charms of peace and retirement', undisturbed by the civic unrest or poverty of the period.⁴ There were no mechanised threshing machines or steam tractors here, nor modern 'pitiless, grasping, iron contrivances': instead, the land had long been cultivated for agricultural practices using traditional methods and tools (wooden ploughs, fag-hooks and forks that had 'gone on without appreciable change of form or method of using, for hundreds of years').⁵ It had also

³ Gertrude Jekyll, *Old West Surrey*, p. vii.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. viii.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 188; p. 181.

been worked over by a cast of wholesome workers, ‘cheerful gangs of hay-makers and harvesters’, who lived nearby in charming cottages, which might be a little damp, but were not dilapidated or full of ‘the signs of squalid and disordered living’.⁶ These aesthetically pleasing and old (but never explicitly dated) dwellings had once been built with local oak and with ‘locally-made hip-tiles’ that lent Jekyll the ‘satisfying conviction of a thing being exactly right’.⁷ They may have had poor labouring inhabitants (likely working long hours in manual roles for no more than 30s.), but they were adjoined by productive, blooming gardens stuffed with cluster rose and hydrangea.⁸ However, the continuation of Jekyll’s narrative was also under threat. She saw modern agricultural developments as fast-displacing nineteenth-century labouring traditions; and in addition, by the 1880s, Surrey ‘wasn’t all cottages, but fast becoming the repository for the mansions of the English Domestic Revival’.⁹ In an attempt at staying the developments of modern country living, Jekyll’s narrative projects—part beautification, part documentation, and part preservation—steadily continued until her 1932 death, fed in no small way by that same well-heeled clientele flooding to her ‘quiet corner of the land’.¹⁰

After all, Jekyll was extraordinarily productive. She provided planting schemes for over three hundred (mostly now lost) gardens worked on across the UK, Europe and the US (153 in collaboration with architects like Edwin Lutyens)—with 166 based within her native Surrey alone.¹¹ Schemes were for both private clients and public spaces, including government departments (like the War Graves Commission); local authorities (especially within her local Godalming); schools, hospitals, and churches.¹² She produced an extensive series of articles in the *Daily Mail*, *The Guardian Newspaper*, and

⁶ Ibid., p. 189; Sturt, *Change in the Village*, p. 8.

⁷ Ibid., p. 5. The greater part of the cottages of interest to Jekyll would have been dwellings surviving from the seventeenth century (see Ralph Nevill, *Old Cottage and Domestic Architecture in South West Surrey and Notes on the Early History of the Division* (Guildford: Billing & Sons, 1889), p. 4.

⁸ Ibid., p. 268.

⁹ Jane Brown, *Gardens of a Golden Afternoon*, p. 30.

¹⁰ Jekyll, *Old West Surrey*, p. viii.

¹¹ Including Sir Robert Lorimer, Oliver Hill, Sidney Barnsley, Sir Herbert Baker, Morley Horder, L. Rome Guthrie, and M. H. Baillie Scott.

¹² Michael Tooley perhaps best summarises some of the cultural expanse of her reach: from ‘publishers (Edward Hudson), newspaper owners (Lord Northcliffe), mill owners (Sir Amos Nelson and J. T. Hemingway), bankers (Otto

the *Daily Express*, as well as for more specialist periodicals like *The Garden* (from 1881 to 1901) and for the well-heeled public of *Country Life* (predominantly from 1901 to 1924), not forgetting single and co-authored books (1889-1931) which repeatedly presented the features and flora of Munstead Wood to readers, often with detailed instructions for the replication of complementary effects.¹³ She cultivated and sold “Munstead” plant varieties from her on-site nursery (producing the flora she proposed for clientele), selling seeds through Carters and Suttons and other distributors.¹⁴ She was a keen painter turned photographer, moving from oil copies of Turner and exhibiting at the Royal Academy to photographing Old West Surrey (and providing the bulk of illustrations for her texts). She was a capable designer and master craftsperson (a proficient thatcher, fence-maker, waller, carpenter, carver, gilder, and metalworker, as well as an embroiderer).¹⁵ She collected articles of rural interest (amassing an archive large enough to be donated to Guildford Museum after her death). And her garden at Munstead, she argued, was her ‘workshop’, her ‘private study and place of rest’.¹⁶ It was the place from which all her projects emanated: from which she could cultivate an independent livelihood and grow an international career as a horticulturalist. She was not merely content to find in the garden a place for private restoration. Instead, prompted by her vision of an older working landscape, she worked to embed life and career within Surrey as she saw it; and to narrate her impression to hope for its persistence.

Falk), local authorities (for example, the borough of Godalming), university colleges (including Newnham College and Girton College, Cambridge), churches (such as St Edmund's and the Wesleyan church, Godalming), schools (Charterhouse), hospitals (King Edward VII Sanatorium, Midhurst, Sussex), and charities (the National Trust), as well as some of the most distinguished public servants in the country such as Lord Curzon, Lord Lytton, Lord Revelstoke, and Reginald McKenna’ (Michael Tooley, ‘Jekyll, Gertrude (1843-1932), Artist and Garden Designer’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (23 September 2004) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/37597>>).

¹³ *Wood and Garden* (1899), *Home and Garden* (1900), *Wall and Water Gardens* (1901), *Old West Surrey* (1904), *Colour in the Flower Garden* (1908).

¹⁴ In 1908, for instance, ‘Polyanthus was bought by Carters among other merchants, lamb’s lettuce and a large annual pink poppy by Vilmorin of Paris, and daffodils and lily of the valley were grown in large beds for sale as cut flowers to Godalming florists’ (Festing, p. 224)

¹⁵ see also Jekyll’s 1870 periwinkle and iris designs for chair seats or cushions in Edwards, p. 43. She could also shoe a horse and in her early years had joined in with reaping at harvest time (Festing, p. 21).

¹⁶ Jekyll, *Colour in the Flower Garden* (London: Country Life and George Newnes Ltd, 1908), p. viii.

Consequently, despite the public distribution of her projects, Jekyll's Surrey character narratives made up a personal mission. Like the working-class cast under her scrutiny, she preferred to remain within her south-western corner of Surrey and adjoining parts of Hampshire and Sussex.¹⁷ The boundaries, laid out in the 1904 *Old West Surrey*, were demarcated through her recourse to a local knowledge—an understanding of the make-up of rural landscape she poses as shared by the common folk of the district. 'Geographical definitions', she argues,

are purely arbitrary, and only really appreciable on the map, where they show in different colours; whereas, in the real world, one steps without knowing it from Surrey into Hampshire on the dry heath-land, and out of Surrey into Sussex from one clay puddle to the next, without being aware in either case that the land is called by another name.¹⁸

'The practical boundaries' of Jekyll country were made up from 'the long chalk line of the Hog's Back on the north', 'beyond Guildford' to the East, and the Weald of Sussex to the South: 'we hardly ever go northward beyond the Hog's Back', she states, taking over the assumed voice of an entire community.¹⁹ However, despite Jekyll's claim that this was a communal knowledge, her interpretation of rural Surrey should be understood as just that: hers alone. It was a personal interpretation for how the area should be conceived, preserved, and designed—and it was deeply informed by her class and high-Victorian artistic education.

Sally Festing has noted how the Jekylls neatly bridged the gap between the upper-middle classes and the landed gentry: Jekyll had access to cottage garden and country estate alike.²⁰ She had also studied painting at the Schools of Art in South Kensington, and had been favourably received amongst

¹⁷ Jekyll, *Old West Surrey*, p. vii.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. vii.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. vii.

²⁰ Festing, p. 5.

cosmopolitan London's artist's circles—1865, Jane Brown recounts, saw visits to such eminent artist-craftsmen as John Ruskin, Phillip Webb, William Morris, with the most renowned denizens of the Royal Academy following.²¹ Her schooling in cosmopolitan taste was completed with European travel: first to Greece and Constantinople (with family friend and Keeper of Greek and Roman Antiquities at the British Museum Charles Newton and wife Mary); then later to Italy, to France, to Spain, and to Algiers. These trips introduced her to the topography and flora of the Mediterranean, as well as the notable gardens of the Italian Renaissance. After she had determined to settle in Munstead, significant elements of all would inform her apparently “local” gardening. However, despite her cosmopolitan education, it was Old West Surrey that prompted her interests in landscape: in later years, owing in part to declining health, she stopped visiting client sites—an apparently curious choice for one preaching intimate familiarity with landscape as necessary for good garden making.²² So considered, it is less surprising that, as Judith Tankard argues, the majority of her commissions replicate a somewhat fixed style, and after a point, she did not visit them. Her remaking of England was based upon her narratives about local Surrey.²³ She does not appear to have seen anything particularly limiting in this—or in the appropriateness of Surrey landscape as a base for gardens further afield (and indeed, her schemes were not always successful). Likewise, as I discuss, her impressions of the local character of Surrey possessed their own significant

²¹ As well as Edward Burne-Jones, D. G. Rossetti, ‘Albert Moore, William de Morgan, Simeon Solomon, Edward Poynter and William Holman Hunt’. G. F. Watts was a considerable Royal Academy influence on Jekyll (Brown, *Gardens of a Golden Afternoon*, p. 22).

²² She relied on photography, detailed correspondence, and soil samples; however, this was not always a successful strategy, especially where the situation differed greatly to the poor sandy soil of Surrey.

²³ Judith B. Tankard, *Gertrude Jekyll and the Country House Garden: From the Country Life Archives* (London: Aurum Press, 2011), p. 77. It is unwise to generalise far between her schemes, although she insisted on the interrelation between garden and landscape outside, and the cultivation of a sense of local character. In his study of two-thousand extant garden plans for over three-hundred sites, Richard Bisgrove suggests that the diversity of Jekyll's numerous English gardens in particular indicates that it is ‘impossible to identify a ‘typical’ Jekyll garden’-- nevertheless, the influence of Munstead Wood on her later compositions should not be understated. Common features included the discreet drive, bordered by evergreen banks; there were long vistas and woodland avenues that naturalised into “wilder” woodland; long herbaceous borders filled with her characteristic colour drifts and oft repeated colour combinations; and overall, a complex and varied ‘interplay and transition between formal and informal’ garden elements (Richard Bisgrove, *The Gardens of Gertrude Jekyll* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), p. 31; p. 32).

limitations: limitations that allow us to consider what was missing from popular accounts of historic country life; and how those accounts could be beautified and promoted through garden design.

Whilst Jekyll was deeply interested in the traditions that made up her locale, hers was almost entirely an aesthetic interest informed by her twinned hatreds for ‘machines and modernity’.²⁴ These hatreds were used to justify her aesthetic vision for a country that had apparently persisted unchanged until recent history, despite all evidence to the contrary—despite the fact that discontent, poverty, arson, and union activity had been recurrent and prevalent themes of rural life for much of recent history.²⁵ Jekyll had ‘little interest in the downtrodden’: indeed, whilst various critics have noted the importance of Ruskin on her keen observation of local wood and heathland, we should not also look to find a Ruskinian interest in social reform in Jekyll’s narratives.²⁶ To understand local landscape (and so to garden well), Jekyll argued that one must see beyond, ‘in a greater degree than the other perceptions of form and proportion that the artist may acquire or cultivate, to see pictures for oneself, not merely to see objects’.²⁷ These pictures, she establishes, are made up from ‘the more numerous and delicate of Nature’s pictorial moods’, and to the untrained eye, only accessible in the form of a ‘painted picture by the artist who understands Nature’s speech and can act as her interpreter’.²⁸ Likewise, the well-designed garden was composed from a ‘series of pictures’ directed towards ‘one harmonious whole’: whilst nature made ideal pictures, gardening could ‘rank as a fine art’.²⁹ So informed by these aesthetic processes of “picturing”, and so definitively conceptualised as an art form, Jekyll’s writing about gardening and about local landscape not only introduces how she understood garden-making as irretrievably bound in artistic

²⁴ Festing, p. 47.

²⁵ Christiana Payne, *Toil and Plenty: Images of the Agricultural Landscape in England, 1780-1890* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 2.

²⁶ Festing, p. 232; Festing and Brown both consider the importance of Ruskin to Jekyll. See also Grace Kehler, ‘Gertrude Jekyll and the Late-Victorian Garden Book: Representing Nature-Culture Relations’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 35 (2007), 617-633; Barbara T. Gates, *Kindred Nature: Victorian and Edwardian Women Embrace the Living World* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998).

²⁷ Jekyll, *Wood and Garden*, p. 25.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

²⁹ Jekyll, *Colour in the Flower Garden*, p. viii; p. vi.

cultures, but also introduces deep tensions between documenting what was really there, and between designing what should be. At its base it is a picturesque sensibility: a sensibility relying on a critical sleight of hand where one was told to look so closely as to not see what was there at all. Rather, Jekyll instructs her reader to see beyond the object and find the picture instead—to see only the ideal, and to look to cultivate it anew.

This is not the place for a comparison between Jekyll's many gardens, or to unpick her colour strategies. Both perspectives are already extensively explored. Richard Bisgrove has provided perhaps the most comprehensive survey of her approach, considering the two-thousand or so working plans Jekyll left for circa 250 sites; with Jane Brown considering in-depth her partnership with Lutyens.³⁰ Both have also examined her use of colour—often cited as her greatest contribution to modern garden history—with Bisgrove considering her study of colour theory at Kensington and the influence the colour blocking of her herbaceous borders took from early study of Turner at the National Gallery, and in Ruskin's lectures about "Turner picturesque", later mapping her colour combinations onto various of Turner's experiments with light and water.³¹ Brown has additionally linked her herbaceous 'impressionism' to her painful myopia (often credited with her move away from painting); as well as noting the significant influence of Michel Chevreul's *The Principles of Harmony and Contrast of Colours and their Application to the Arts* (translated and published in England 1853) and the watercolourist Hercules Brabazon Brabazon on her organised drifts of colour.³² Jekyll's polymathic tendencies are frequently noted within criticism, as is her place amongst the *fin-de-siècle* garden history canon, and as a popular garden writer.³³ All is essential

³⁰ Richard Bisgrove, *The Gardens of Gertrude Jekyll* (Boston, Toronto and London: Little Brown and Company, 1992), p. 6; Jane Brown, *Gardens of a Golden Afternoon: The Story of a Partnership, Edwin Lutyens and Gertrude Jekyll* (London: Allen Lane, 1982).

³¹ Bisgrove, p. 10; Richard Bisgrove, 'The Colour of Creation: Gertrude Jekyll and the Art of Flowers', in *Journal of Experimental Botany*, 64 (2013), 5873-5793.

³² Brown, p. 25; p. 42; See also Joan Edwards, 'Prelude and Fugue', in *Gertrude Jekyll: Essays in the Life of a Working Amateur*, ed. by Michael Tooley, Primrose Arnander (Durham: Michaelmas Books, 1995), pp. 42-56.

³³ For accounts of the breadth of Jekyll's activities, see Michael Tooley, Primrose Arnander (eds.), *Gertrude Jekyll: Essays in the Life of a Working Amateur*, paying particular attention to Joan Edwards, 'Prelude and Fugue'; Fenja Gunn, 'Gertrude Jekyll's Workbook', pp. 57-64; and Mavis Batey, 'Gertrude Jekyll and the Arts and Crafts Movement', pp. 63-70. Also see Martin A. Wood; Judith B. Tankard, *Gertrude Jekyll at Munstead Wood: Writing*,

work in helping to pin down her cultural relevance, and in working to track the discourses that make their way from the arts into high garden design. Nevertheless, there is more to do not just in considering the influence of the arts on Edwardian garden design, but in considering the influence outwards from garden design circles back into the arts. This chapter looks to do so, highlighting the narrative movements that make up Jekyll's "local" garden, considering how these movements work to match her textual and photographic histories of Surrey, and finally how we can read her influence as feeding back out into wider artistic cultures.

This work has already begun: Anne Helmreich has attributed Jekyll's particular success to a range of factors: good marketing not-in-the-least (Jekyll's promotion in the pages of *Country Life*, she notes, where new Jekyll and Lutyens gardens 'appeared cheek to jowl with articles on Elizabethan manors [and] aged cottages', ensured that 'their work was understood as authentically rural and in keeping' with wider ideals of Englishness').³⁴ Helmreich continues to rightly state that much of Jekyll's cultural significance derived from her ability to combine cultural signifiers from a range of sources also understood as innately English, from the cottage garden to the formal tradition of the old country house, pressing in on her fascination with the local.³⁵ Her study consequently has made an essential start on pinning down Jekyll's cultural relevance, by considering how Jekyll's gardens were marketed and understood as holding up an ideal of Englishness. I build upon this work by arguing that the processes by which Jekyll gardened and wrote about it; and by which she cultivated an ideal and authentically understood, local landscape, and then promoted it, make up narratives about how rural England should be understood and preserved.

Horticulture, Photography and Homebuilding (London: Pimpernel Press, 2015); Festing. For commentary on Jekyll designs in context, see Judith Tankard, *Gertrude Jekyll and the Country House Garden*; Brent Elliott, *The Country House Garden: From the Annals of Country Life (1897-1939)* (London: Mitchell Beazley, 1995); Anne Helmreich, *The English Garden and National Identity: The Competing Styles of Garden Design, 1870-1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Brent Elliott, *Victorian Gardens*; David Ottewill, *The Edwardian Garden*. For Jekyll and garden writing, see Beverly Seaton, 'The Garden Autobiography', *The Gardens Trust*, 7 (1979), 101-120; Grace Kehler, 'Gertrude Jekyll and the Late-Victorian Garden Book'; Sarah Bilston, 'Queens of the Garden: Victorian Gardeners and the Rise of the Gardening Advice Text'; Barbara T. Gates, *Kindred Nature: Victorian and Edwardian Women Embrace the Living World* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998).

³⁴ Helmreich, p. 155.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

Beyond nationalism, recognising Jekyll's gardens as much a part of her aesthetic quasi-history project about local Surrey as her texts provides an excellent introduction into the significant overlap between the making of modern gardens, the making of histories of rural landscape, and modern art. The undeniable factors of Jekyll's success, national reach, and influence permit us to untangle many of the narrative threads going into the make-up, and the promotion, of the period's "Great English garden", moving from modern garden design discourse to the working country landscape and back again. As I discuss, ensuring the garden scheme would read as a natural part of local landscape involved constant narrative re-positionings, constant localisations of "exotic" sources, and constant negotiations with the wide-ranging contexts of contemporary garden design as they crossed through the wider arts. By unpicking some of these narrativist strategies, this chapter provides a lingering cultural backdrop against which to situate the other gardens of this thesis. Ultimately, reading Jekyll's gardens allows us to see not just how the cultivation of a successful garden industry could make a place for Jekyll to live and work in modern England, but it also enlightens our understanding of how the modern country garden could be used to also make wide-ranging histories about an ideally understood countryside: histories stretching out across the arts.

Local Colouring: In Pursuit of Character in Old West Surrey

Fully unpicking Jekyll's attempt at self-placing within Surrey requires an in-depth consideration of how she interpreted local "rural character"; doing so reveals the narratives she made about its preservation, and the traditions she was placing herself within. To do so, I examine *Old West Surrey* (1904): a text instrumental in selling her vision of Surrey to readers. Jekyll's text roams "traditional" landscapes, selecting and "documenting" appropriate examples of character: the buildings, tools, furnishings, and people she viewed as typical to the locale. These were catalogued to determine that there was something worth preserving in twentieth-century England. However, depending on the selection of the "right" sort of

evidence, I argue that Jekyll's narratives materialise a tension between the observation of what was actually there, and the aestheticisation of what was nearly lost. They demonstrate that picturesque sleight-of-hand in action: that push to see beyond objects towards a pictured ideal. Her narratives about historic rural tradition make aesthetic judgements on what should be included in the Surrey of her present. By promoting her own new designs as firmly based within a pre-existing, authentic rural tradition, she could suggest that they offered a continuation of that tradition for modern England.

Old West Surrey provides the most clarity on her characterisation of rural England, yet even here Jekyll defines "character" implicitly: examples of "good" rural life are gathered together before the reader. The text is nevertheless her most ostensibly documentary work, illustrated by 330 of her photographs of rural sites and artefacts, many of the latter having been borrowed from friends for photographing, or 'secured' from country sales for their quality (according to Jekyll), of 'being considered typical' of local character.³⁶ Rather than being passed 'into dealer's hands' to be 'sold as curiosities and antiquities', these once 'common things of daily use' were accumulated, documented, and promoted.³⁷ Nevertheless, a tension quickly emerges between her intention to document and her aestheticisations. *Old West Surrey* is posed 'with no claim to a thorough or comprehensive description of people or objects', but rather as a 'fragmentary' record.³⁸ 'The most' it 'can attempt', Jekyll argues, 'is to give some idea of the general aspects of the older country life and gear, and possibly to convey to the reader some slight idea of their character'.³⁹ It was driven by personal recollection 'refreshed and augmented by recent conversations with a few friends in the immediate neighbourhood'; and, as noted, the boundaries of the land had also been defined under her authority. Based so firmly in her own impressions, Jekyll's text acts as a manifesto for her vision for rural England. Her determination that it only provides a "fragmentary" record augments the urgency of her presentation of cultures nearly lost,

³⁶ Ibid., p. x.

³⁷ Ibid., p. ix.

³⁸ *Old West Surrey*, p. ix.

³⁹ Ibid., p. ix.

and her repeated insistence on the uncomprehensive nature of her study also has the benefit of functioning as a critical get-out-of-jail-free card. The narrative does not need to include everything, because it is her narrative about her ideal Surrey—she may select as she pleases. Nevertheless, by repeatedly categorising the items she chooses as demonstrative of a pre-existing general character, she suggests that her ideal Surrey does correspond to what the actual Surrey was “generally” like. What Jekyll means by “character”, then, is something slippery and elusive: a means to justify her personal tastes about what landscape should look like. By pointing to long histories of use and apparent appropriateness, Jekyll could aim to cultivate an authentically anti-modern “style” and insist upon the historic relevance of her own cultivations.

To move beyond Jekyll’s vague generalities, we can consider what can be learned from her “catalogue” of Old Surrey life. Her “common things” and cultivated places make up the bulk of what is presented: cottages constructed of ‘brick-noggin’ or roofed with ‘Horsham slabs’; oak dressers and furnishings photographed and described as handed down for generations; shepherd’s crooks and mole traps; and profuse cottage gardens. ‘Nowhere else’, Jekyll argues, ‘does one see such Wallflowers, Sweet-Williams, and Canterbury Bells, as in these carefully tended little plots’.⁴⁰ Her insistence on the abundance of the typical cottage garden lies at odds with the wider cultural recognition of rural poverty—which was even seeping into contemporary gardening periodicals. An 1882 contribution to *The Garden* had argued that ‘the garden plot of the agricultural labourer as a rule is the worst cultivated in the parish’, indicating that ‘his hours of leisure are few and needed for rest’.⁴¹ Such recognitions did not stop Jekyll idealising the cottager’s plot as prompt for aesthetic delight, to the extent that her cottage gardens become divorced from their social contexts. Jekyll’s plots reside instead in the artistic tradition of the labourer’s country garden, which was by the publication of *Old West Surrey* a ‘stock feature’ in British landscape

⁴⁰ Jekyll, *Old West Surrey*, p. 1; p. 4

⁴¹ Peregrine, ‘Cottager’s Gardens’ *The Garden*, 23 September 1882, p. 283.

art.⁴² Martin Postle notes the “Cottage Door” genre inaugurated by Thomas Gainsborough as an early example (albeit one registering picturesque decay rather than the well-tended garden), before the auspice of the blooming plot under mid-century efforts of Surrey watercolourists like Miles Birket Foster, and, as I shortly discuss, Helen Allingham; and the wider agricultural landscape genre should be considered another a direct progenitor.⁴³ Following John Barrell, Christiana Payne has considered how fine art depictions of agricultural landscape 1780-1890 propagated myths about the tending of an ideal countryside and its inhabitants: much of the genre, Payne reports, represents the corn-growing Southern counties around London where wages was particularly low.⁴⁴ The repeal of the Corn Laws (1846), which had restricted the importation of cheap cereal from abroad, caused the progressive devaluation of British-grown grains, with the knock-on-effect of a prolonged agricultural depression and greater labour insecurity for workers.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, paintings of a cheerful rural workforce amongst abundant, harvest-ready fields became another visual stock feature: ‘a reassuring indicator’, Payne notes, ‘that the social structure was safe in the countryside’; and the labourer happy with his lot.⁴⁶ In Jekyll’s hands, the stock labourer not only continued to be happy with his lot, but had long been so, signalling instead to cultures lost.

Drawing on Jeremy Burchardt’s essential study of the nineteenth-century allotment movement, Postle reads the burgeoning stock cottage garden ideal as influenced by middle-class interests in the aesthetic value of the productive cottage garden plot in the wake of late-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth century efforts to provide allotments—rented plots of land, including the cottage garden plot—to the rural

⁴² Martin Postle, ‘Country Gardens’, in *Art of the Garden: The Garden in British Art, 1800 to the Present Day*, ed. by Nicholas Alfrey, Stephen Daniels and Martin Postle (London: Tate Publishing, 2004) pp. 12-21 (p. 12).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁴⁴ Payne, pp. 5-6; see also John Barrell, *The Dark Side of Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting 1730-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). Ysanne Holt’s *Modernists and the British Landscape* takes the study further still into the twentieth century.

⁴⁵ Howkins,

⁴⁶ Payne, p. 31.

labouring class.⁴⁷ Burchardt argues that allotments ‘were a vector for the modernisation of rural society’, exerting substantial impact on rural living conditions, with the movement possessing strong links to agricultural trade unionism.⁴⁸ Whilst the *fin-de-siècle* cottage garden was frequently sentimentalised as an abundant floral marker of a soon-to-be lost old England, it should nevertheless be read as a continuation of that earlier radical impulse. Postle suggests that the social value of such sites was steadily translated into an aesthetic one from the mid 1840s, highlighting the magazine of the Labourer’s Friend Society (LFS) as a key example of the transition. The LFS posed that the allotment system had

converted some of the most rough and uncomely villages in the kingdom into so many rural Auburns—into scenes of comfort, cleanliness, and picturesque beauty—into cottage gardens, breathing the scent of flowers around.⁴⁹

This conflation of social and aesthetic value permits the aesthetic to stand in for, and become representative of, a well-functioning social system. Instead of signifying modern social reform, Jekyll’s rather more conservative equation of flourishing rural community with flourishing rural garden (even if this was itself greatly embellished) signified that all was well and good in Old West Surrey, and had been for some time.

Whilst Jekyll frequently invokes historic artefact permitting an assumed access to the early-nineteenth century and beyond, the conditions she can be reasonably expected to remember are not until midcentury, and her early childhood in Bramley. Her “recollections” can be read as returning to the sub-period in the history of rural England that Howkins has roughly categorised as entering a period of relative calm (c. 1850-1875) after fifty years of ‘endemic unrest and economic uncertainty’: yet in her

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 13.

⁴⁸ Jeremy Burchardt, *The Allotment Movement in England, 1793-1873* (New York: Boydell & Brewer, 2002), p. 5; p. 6.

⁴⁹ The LFS, quoted in Postle, p. 13.

return to an earlier England still, Jekyll extends her perception of a Surrey characterised by simple contentment back into the first decades of the 1800s.⁵⁰ This period had overseen the progressive dispossession of agricultural workers, and was consequently of particular interest to the growing early-twentieth-century field of agrarian studies.⁵¹ The modern parliamentary enclosure of common land (most concentrated after the Inclosure Act of 1773) had engendered the removal of common rights to “waste” land farmed through the open-field system, in favour of the landowner holding sole rights—it was a social issue that the allotment movement had aimed to counter; and so also one that can be read as birthing Jekyll’s cottage garden ideal. G. E. Mingay has discussed how J. L. and Barbara Hammond’s hugely popular 1911 *The Village Labourer* entrenched a widespread cultural view that parliamentary enclosure was ‘the root cause’ of the period’s unrest: whilst the truth was more complicated (and less nationally generalisable), enclosure ‘gave rise to friction, discontent, even violence’—as well as removing any possibility of the labouring class gaining value from common land.⁵² However, as the cottage garden becomes an aestheticised stock figure, enclosure is not in *Old West Surrey’s* history, despite it being difficult to imagine the local labouring population being as welcome in the English gardens of the Surrey elite as Jekyll apparently was across the district.⁵³ Even well-meaning visitors were discouraged from dropping in at Munstead, and her texts were often prefaced with the plea that readers would not request to visit.⁵⁴

Adding to the contexts of progressively frustrated land rights and sustained agricultural depression, early-nineteenth-century Surrey was also the site for attempted labour reform, culminating in

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. ix; Alun Howkins, *Reshaping Rural England*, p. 2.

⁵¹ Refer to G. E. Mingay for a survey of this cultural and academic interest in the cultivation (and population of modern Rural England): for early accounts of the impact of Enclosure, see Gilbert Slater’s *The English Peasantry and the Enclosure of Common Fields* (1907); J. L. and Barbara Hammond’s *The Village Labourer* (1911); and E. C. K. Gonner’s *Common Land and Inclosure* (1912) (G. E. Mingay, *Parliamentary Enclosure in England: An Introduction to its Causes, Incidence, and Impact 1750-1850* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 2).

⁵² Mingay, p. 2.

⁵³ Mingay, pp. 2-3.

⁵⁴ See *Colour in the Flower Garden*, p. viii.

the 1830 Swing Riots. Workers across Southern England demonstrated against the tithe system, the instability of worker's wages, and the introduction of mechanised threshing machines seen to further threaten employability.⁵⁵ As is well-known, Surrey radical farmer, journalist, popular author and rural reformer William Cobbett was accused (and acquitted) of inciting revolt; and as Roger Wells argues, Cobbett was instrumental in encouraging public awareness of the potential of revolution for rural reform.⁵⁶ In what might at first appear a surprising turn, Jekyll references Cobbett in her hunt for early nineteenth-century character; however, Jekyll's Cobbett is depoliticised. Cobbett, 'who was a West Surrey man', Jekyll states, is used to provide some context for the long working hours and habitual child labour of the period (although Jekyll does not get any more specific than "long"); and is credited with the introduction of straw-plattling as a local pastime (although Jekyll does not provide evidence for this claim).⁵⁷ We could be charitable, and suggest that she was unaware of Cobbett's radical history, or that her attempt at gesturing, however implicitly, to the difficult living conditions of the early nineteenth century makes a tacit endorsement of his radical sensibilities. However, it appears far more likely that she simply glosses over the hard truth, reworking Cobbett into an appropriate source.⁵⁸ She moves quickly from vague descriptions of child labour to surmise that 'the children were better disciplined and therefore better mannered in these old, hard-working days'; moving quickly too, from an old labourer's reminiscence that 'We was hungry always—never had a bellyful', to undermine the impact of this statement by suggesting that various of 'these sparsely-fed people were wonderfully strong'.⁵⁹ Despite Jekyll's avowed interest in characterising a Surrey before her time, the actual plight of farm-labourers never really comes into play. There are no riots in Old West Surrey, and whilst hunger might (just) be present in living memory, it has no lasting effects. After-all, such contexts contradicted Jekyll's vision of

⁵⁵ Howkins, p. 106.

⁵⁶ Roger Wells, 'William Cobbett, Captain Swing, and King William IV', *The Agricultural History Review*, 45 (1997), 34-48 (p. 34).

⁵⁷ Jekyll, *Old West Surrey*, p. 237; p. 160.

⁵⁸ Such narrative resituating was not uncommon in the period: Nunn notes some additional instances of the use of Cobbett in the situation of the country cottage as signal of England (p. 188).

⁵⁹ Jekyll, *Old West Surrey*, p. 237; p. 239.

a vaguely-old, aesthetically understood way of life that had contentedly continued undisturbed for generations, and was to be presented as continuing onwards in her texts and gardens.

We can learn from *Old West Surrey* (although its representativeness should be questioned): about the use of fag-hooks at harvest-time; or about local paving methods, like the ‘rough paving of Bargate slabs’ (a butter-coloured sandstone quarried around Godalming), and the technique of ‘pitching’ ‘the local black iron-stones’ on their side (such a technique not only ‘looks well’, Jekyll argued, but did not ‘show the slightest evidence of wear’ over a full century.⁶⁰ She gives some indication of local wages (labourers 18-30s. and farm labourers 13-16s.), but gives limited context to determine their fairness or representativeness.⁶¹ Jekyll’s is overwhelmingly a collector’s emphasis on the aesthetic appearance of country life; one justified by a vague determination that things were “just right” because they had long been so. It is a conscious vagueness she makes some attempt to pin down: ‘[o]ften, in speaking of these country buildings’, she writes,

I have been asked what I mean or understand by the style of the country. I can only explain it thus. The local tradition in building is the crystallisation of local need, material and ingenuity. When the result is so perfect, that is to say, when the adaption of means to ends is so satisfactory that it has held good for a long time, and that no local need or influence can change it for the better, it becomes a style, and remains fixed until other conditions arise to disturb it.⁶²

Jekyll’s definition requires “characterful” items of note to be old, to be found locally, to be handed down over generations, and to respond to local need. However, what goes unsaid is the aesthetic quality of pictorial appropriateness tying her definition together. She rails against the ‘temptation of cheapness’ leading to the displacement of ‘the home-made tiles and honest ancient oak of the ancient dwellings’, without considering that “cheapness” was also a pressing local need for locals.⁶³ ‘[T]here is a special

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 11-12.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 212; p. 214; p. 239.

⁶² Ibid., pp. 5-6.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 6.

charm’, she determines, after considering the visual effect of the old hip-tile’s ‘saw-edged profile telling well against the sky’; and that ‘satisfying conviction of a thing being exactly right, about all the building details that are of local tradition and form the local style’: an insistence, above all, that there was something authentic to be found.⁶⁴

Jekyll’s hunt for an old countryside made up one part of a contemporary cultural project deeply concerned with the documentation of national, vernacular cultures: a project active within Surrey. *Old West Surrey* came in the wake of earlier efforts like Ralph Nevill’s 1889 *Old Cottage and Domestic Architecture in South West Surrey*, a guide to the architectural features found in the domestic buildings of cottage ‘character’.⁶⁵ It would be remiss not to re-highlight fellow Surrey writer George Sturt, who began in 1901 with *The Bettesworth Book*, positing that Surrey field labourers like Sturt’s titular figure were ‘not without poetry because they lack verse’, finding it instead in ‘their wind-blown, sun-burned toil’.⁶⁶ Sturt moved to his surveys of change in the (Surrey) village (a study revisiting so many of the themes of *Old West Surrey* that it would be unbelievable had he not come into contact with it); and later works like the aforementioned *Wheelwright’s Shop* (1923): a text which, as noted, Bullard has recently worked to critically rehabilitate. This ‘unavoidably elegiac’ record of the provincial traditions of local waggon-makers also feels marked by *Old West Surrey*’s hunt for authenticity, and throws new light on Jekyll’s own earlier project.⁶⁷ For Sturt, the objects of old rural life could directly communicate histories to those who understood: a farm-waggon, he quotes, was a “photographic negative, showing, to those who know

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 5.

⁶⁵ However, whilst Nevill takes this slippery sense of character as his starting point, his aim was to go beyond the ‘vague generalities’ of claims of the situational “appropriateness” defining a common understanding of the cottage picturesque to document common architectural features. See Ralph Nevill, *Old Cottage and Domestic Architecture in South West Surrey and Notes on the Early History of the Division* (Guildford: Billing & Sons, 1889), p. 10.

⁶⁶ George Sturt, *The Bettesworth Book* (London: 1901), p. x; see also Sturt’s range of other studies along a similar theme, including *Memoirs of a Surrey Labourer* (1907); *Change in the Village* (1911); *Lucy Bettesworth* (1913); *William Smith, Farmer and Potter: 1790-1858* (1919); *A Farmer’s Life, with a Memoir of the Farmer’s Sister* (1922); *The Wheelwright’s Shop* (1923).

⁶⁷ Paddy Bullard, ‘Restoring the Wheelwright’s Shop’, *The Journal of Modern Craft*, 13 (2020), 161-178 (p. 165; p. 171).

what it means, the normal English farm-land".⁶⁸ For both Sturt and Jekyll, objects did signify to that greater ideal context of Old English rural life: perhaps providing indisputable proof of its existence, if they could be shared. Photography more widely certainly appeared to offer a distinctly documentary purpose. As part of the wider photographic survey movement (1885-1918), and the efforts of the National Photographic Record Association (1897-1910) was the Photographic Survey of Surrey, calling from 1902 for amateurs to submit photographs as record of local sites of historic importance.⁶⁹ By 1909, 3000 prints had been deposited to the Public Library in Croydon for common reference, with Jekyll contributing the prints taken for *Old West Surrey* in 1908; yet here too aesthetics remained central.⁷⁰ John Taylor argues that despite the objective aims of the surveys, and the matter that the apparent mimesis of the photograph suggested an unmediated and accurate representation, the survey nevertheless prioritised an idealised view. He concludes that the project rested on the premise that if the ideal landscape 'could be saved in pictures', there was (again) 'evidence that the landscape really did exist'.⁷¹

Jekyll takes this critical sleight-of-hand further still: her photographs for *Old West Surrey* were retouched pre-publication to emphasise her aesthetic vision. Heather Angel has recounted some of these edits—'An Old Cottage at Elstead' 'has the sky painted over in white' and the right-hand back-ground darkened; the roses and pot-plant in 'Banksian rose around a cottage window' have been brightened against their backgrounds to ensure flora contrasts against the compositions; chains disappear from a stile in 'The Five-Barred Gate'—a further distancing of Enclosure from Old West Surrey.⁷² And even these

⁶⁸ Sturt in Bullard, p. 173.

⁶⁹ As John Taylor notes, the aims of the Photographic Survey of Surrey were to preserve 'records of Antiquity, Anthropology, Buildings of Interest, Geology, Natural History, Passing Events of local and historical importance, Portraits of Notable Persons, Old Documents, Rare Books, Prints, Maps, and Scenery'. John Taylor, 'The Alphabetic Universe: Photography and the Picturesque Landscape' in *Reading Landscape: Country—City—Capital*, ed. by Simon Pugh (Manchester and New York: MUP, 1990), pp. 177-196 (p. 187); see also Elizabeth Edwards, 'Photograph and the Material Performance of the Past', *History and Theory*, 48 (2009), 130-135.

⁷⁰ Heather Angel, 'Gertrude Jekyll as Photographer', in *Gertrude Jekyll: Essays on the Life of a Working Amateur*, ed. by Michael Tooley and Primrose Arnander (Durham: Michaelmas Books, 1995), pp. 155-162 (p. 159).

⁷¹ Taylor, p. 184.

⁷² Angel, pp. 159-160.

selective edits of Surrey life were not uncommon in the period. The aforementioned Allingham, popular painter of both the blooming country cottage garden and Jekyll's borders at Munstead Wood, is also known to have edited her sources. Her alluring watercolours were collated in volumes like the tellingly titled *Happy England* (1909), where country folk appear on garden paths with a child under one arm and a basket on the other. However, Helmreich notes that when her depiction of Unstead Farm is compared to Jekyll's contemporary photographs, the actual cabbage-heavy plots have been displaced in favour of flora peeking behind dry-stone walls.⁷³ Jekyll was nevertheless in favour of the Allingham approach: despite the fact that her predominate audience was a London middle class likely contributing to the modern development of the county, *Old West Surrey* directs its readers to *Happy England* to further clarify what appropriate character looked like: this was 'a book of beautiful pictures' Jekyll argued, 'that show far better than I can attempt to describe, the charm that belongs to these old West Surrey cottages'.⁷⁴ As in the garden, the "picture" was always to displace the real objective truth of country life.

Surrey was also a hotbed for more physical acts of collection that were equally interested in memorialising a similarly appraised authentic old character. Eight miles from Godalming lay the Haslemere 'Peasants Arts' industries (with workshops dedicated to reviving traditional weaving, pottery and woodworking processes held between 1896-1914), and the Peasant Handicraft Museum (later the Peasant Arts Museum), opened to the public in 1910, which housed a collection of art and 'everyday objects' from across Europe, exhibited to encourage their interpretation as 'domestic and utilitarian' objects.⁷⁵ The Haslemere collection, made-up in large part by local antiquarian Gerald S. Davies' six-hundred item strong personal collection was defined through the selection of objects that demonstrated

⁷³ Pamela Gerrish Nunn has nevertheless demonstrated how in the face of developing twentieth-century avant-garde painting, the apparently representative realist style of Allingham's bright, abundant watercolours seemed to continue suggesting the objectivity of Allingham's views. See Nunn, p. 198.

⁷⁴ Nunn, p. 197; Jekyll, *Old West Surrey*, p. 8.

⁷⁵ Alla Myzelev, 'Collecting Peasant Europe: Peasant Utilitarian Objects as Museum Artifacts', in *Material Cultures, 1740-1920: The Meanings and Pleasures of Collecting*, ed. by Alla Myzelev and John Potvin (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 171- 190 (p. 173).

the ‘production of pleasure in the making and in the use, but not to produce direct gain of money’—this supposed abstraction from the modern capitalist marketplace, Davies considered, meant that peasants might ‘achieve an ideal balance between form and ornament’.⁷⁶ Whilst the Haslemere collection postdates *Old West Surrey*, we can be sure about Jekyll’s complementary aims: not in the least because Davies is listed in the preface to the text as one of the ‘friends’ trusted to corroborate Jekyll’s own history project.⁷⁷ Both exhibit a like emphasis on collecting the signifiers of historic life for the preservation of an assumed anti-modern authenticity. This “authenticity” needed to be documented, but it could also be aimed for in new design that similarly aimed to capture its spirit and apparent balance between form and need.

The full list of named parties trusted to corroborate Jekyll’s project includes

Colonel and Mrs. Godwin-Austen of Shalford House; Miss Ewart of Coney-hurst; Miss Kiddell, formerly schoolmistress at Bramley; Mr. James Jackson, engineer and builder, of Bramley; Mr. George Tickner, carpenter and builder, of Milford; John Eastwood, Esq. of Enton; the Rev. Gerald S. Davies, of the Charterhouse; the Rev. W. H. Winn, Rector of Dunsfold, and the Rev. George Chilton.⁷⁸

All are local individuals with prominent respectable local positions, holding complementary opinions about the conversation of Surrey character. There are three clergymen, one schoolmistress, and additional personalities of no small means and with vested (and sometimes landed) interest in the loss of the signifiers of rural England. Mary Anne Ewart (an early member for the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings) had commissioned Coneyhurst from Philip Webb (a founding member of SPAB); it was built 1883-1886.⁷⁹ The Austen family had been connected with Guildford from the beginning of the

⁷⁶ Myzeley, p. 174; Davies in Myzeley, p. 174; Myzeley, p. 175. Myzelev separates the aims of the Haslemere museum from wider interest in “peasant art”, noting that due to the wider late-nineteenth-century interest in locating, defining, and memorialising “folk” peasant cultures across Europe, by the twentieth century the process and criteria governing the collection of peasant art was little different to the collection of “high art”, and had consequently developed into a lucrative market.

⁷⁷ Jekyll, *Old West Surrey*, p. ix.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. ix.

⁷⁹ Nikolaus Pevsner, Ian Nairn and Bridget Cherry, *The Buildings of England: Surrey* (London: Harmondsworth, 1971), p. 227. Other members of SPAB in the first year (1877) included Morris, Flower, Ionides, Watts, Burne-Jones, De Morgan, Millais and Ruskin (Mark Swenarton, *Artisans and Architects: The Ruskinian Tradition in Architectural Thought* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), p. 39).

fourteenth century, and Shalford House originally built by the Austens circa 1610 (it had been sold in 1899 owing to financial issues, with the Austens newly disconnected from their heritage).⁸⁰ Eastwood commissioned planting for the 1881 Surrey vernacular-style Enton Hall from Jekyll at various points from 1901-1922.⁸¹ Tickner possessed a building yard in Godalming that had influenced the young Lutyens—Jekyll’s frequent partner-in-arms in appropriate new design.⁸² Of the remaining individuals, less is known; however, the suitability of their interests to Jekyll’s quasi-history project can be comfortably assumed, especially when we consider that many had links to Jekyll and Lutyens projects in the area, both through commission and the hiring of approved trade firms.⁸³ *Old West Surrey* was never just about documentation, but also about the justification of appropriate modern design.

Jekyll’s other “friends” were the labourers peopling *Old West Surrey*—appearing, finally, as stock features determining a reassuring reading of Jekyll’s history. The ‘cheerful’ haymaker is joined by the ‘good carter’, defined by his love of ornamenting his horses (‘when I see a well-looking team, made unusually smart for the road or town’, Jekyll clarifies, ‘I know that the carter is a good fellow, who takes a right pride in his work’).⁸⁴ Then there are the elderly population with genuine access to early-nineteenth-century Surrey: these are ‘bright and cheerful of face, pleasant and ready of speech’.⁸⁵ These are also figures divorced from any histories of unrest—indeed, returned to the context of the Swing Riots, their “cheerful” acquiescence of their lot makes an uncomfortable challenge to any possibility that there

Ewart was also *au fait* with the Jekyll garden, proposing Alfred Hoare Powell ‘a disciple of Jekyll, to design a sunken rose garden in front of Sidgwick Hall’, Oxford (Margaret Birney Vickery, *Buildings for Bluestockings: The Architecture and Social History of Women’s Colleges in Late Victorian England* (Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 2000), p. 68).

⁸⁰ After the sale of the main house, the Austens moved to Nore farm, a more manageable property on the estate. The Colonel was a topographer, geologist, and naturalist, with a landed interest in the preservation of old Surrey.

⁸¹ Including, in 1910, planting for Eastwood’s new West Surrey Golf Club on the Enton estate (Godalming Museum, Gertrude Jekyll, ‘Notebook 29’, 2202.29.03).

⁸² See Brown’s *Gardens of a Golden Afternoon* for a full account of their partnership.

⁸³ Rev. Winn commissioned Winn Hall (now a community hall) c. 1914-16 in Surrey Vernacular style. It was built by Underwoods, a building firm used for several Lutyens-designed houses in the area, although Winn Hall was not one of them.

⁸⁴ Jekyll, *Old West Surrey*, p. 189.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 213; p. 218;

was anything to rebel against. These objects of attention are rarely named—they are “the worker”, “the labourer”, the “old-brick layer”, or some other similar moniker. The text’s frontispiece, illustrated with a photographed nonagenarian, seated and shawled, is simply captioned ‘Old West Surrey’.⁸⁶ ‘Old Bowbrick’ receives a name, but not a face—instead he is sketched as Jekyll remembers him: at church, from behind, head tied neatly in a handkerchief.⁸⁷ Late in the text, Jekyll’s introductory figure returns—photographed once again, and referred to as ‘my old friend’.⁸⁸ Jekyll reproduces the ninety-year-old woman’s two-page ‘autobiography’ with its original spelling, reductively maintaining that despite its ‘odd childishness’ it ‘seemed to give so pleasant an idea of the simple happiness and contentment of rural life in the early nineteenth-century’.⁸⁹ Such a judgement cements how the working class (and their landscape) should be read: familiar, presentable, simple, content, hard-working, god-fearing, *old*: but not dead yet. The twentieth-century west Surrey, Jekyll argues, should be designed to fit this brief, for then the older landscape might be preserved—or at least appear as if it had been.

Jekyll’s more explicitly garden-based texts narrate this transition between an old Surrey to and new design to signal her heritage within the land. Texts like *Home and Garden* (1900) can therefore be considered as offering manifestos for “proper” modern design, with Jekyll’s descriptions of her own constructions providing the benchmark for good new taste in old surroundings. *Home and Garden* with the building of Munstead Wood House (1896-1897): a construction that does not

stare with newness; it is not new in any way that is disquieting to the eye; it is neither raw nor callow. On the contrary, it almost gives the impression of a comfortable maturity of something like a couple of hundred years. And yet there is nothing sham-old about it; it is not trumped-up

⁸⁶ Ibid., frontispiece.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 230.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 236.

with any specious or fashionable devices of spurious antiquity [...] but it is designed and built in the thorough and honest spirit of the good work of old days.⁹⁰

Whilst it may be an example of modern design, Jekyll carefully couches her construction within that older heritage: the success of her design rides on its visual correspondence with her aesthetic impression of the locality. Such correspondence is defined by companionable ease and more satisfying visual appropriateness: the design does not pretend nor shout for attention but rather impress its presence comfortably, and with immediate familiarity. She takes pains to distance the influence she has taken from nearby architecture from any fashionable, imitative interest in particular period: this building, too, she signals, demonstrates that slippery spirit of authenticity. The house had been designed by Lutyens after several years of discussion on local architectural style. Neither Jekyll nor Lutyens could have been satisfied with architectural copy: instead, the pair's local observations were translated to impress 'the general characteristics of the older structures of its own district'.⁹¹ In one sense, the generality of Munstead was a necessary condition of the refusal to copy—of their intention towards good, new-old design. Nevertheless, Jekyll's characterisation of the building as general also signals once more to the existence of an identifiable type of character ripe for imaginative transformation: one that could be based within an authentic pre-existing heritage. Her argument is that by paying attention to specific building traditions, new constructions act as preservations of old character.

To appropriately embed with nearby properties the house was constructed from local oak (with beams coming from trees, Jekyll notes, growing from a sandy-banked lane walking distance from Munstead) and Bargate stone, and topped 'with a deep roof of hand-made tiles'.⁹² The result, Jekyll determined, was a building of 'cottage character': a character again determined by the appearance that it

⁹⁰ Gertrude Jekyll, *Home and Garden: Notes and Thoughts, Practical and Critical, of a Working Amateur* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1900), pp. 1-2.

⁹¹ Jekyll, *Home and Garden*, p. 1.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 4; Brown, p. 34

had been in the district for hundreds of years; and that it had emerged from that vague tradition of “good” building.⁹³ If the reader remained in doubt regarding what “good” building looked like, Jekyll reinforces her narrative by delighting in the rural craftsmen who had done the work. She moves to a lyrical, sensual attention to the sights and sounds of the building process: the ‘melodious scream’ of the carpenter’s plane ‘as it gives out its long fragrant ribbon of a shaving’; and the foreman mid brick-lay, defined by a ‘smiling face’ and the graceful ornaments of action in half-unconscious flourishes of the trowel’.⁹⁴ Here, then, is Jekyll’s aesthetic quasi-history project materialised: a style of anti-modern modern design placed within a heritage of her own making; and a possible solution to the loss of the signifiers of working rural life. This was an argument narrated beyond text. As I now discuss, the Munstead gardens offered another way to cultivate her ideal local countryside: another way to signal that the forms and traditions of Old West Surrey might live on.

To Surrey for Good: Gardening Munstead

Jekyll’s gardens continue picturing the preservation of “good” local character, and so to narrate her interpretation of an ideal local Surrey. However, whilst reading her gardens as providing a material counterpart to her texts demonstrates how the country garden possessed the capacity for materialising ideal landscapes, close attention to the processes by which Jekyll cultivated an impression of locality also highlights the cross-cultural interchanges at the heart of high gardening design. For whilst Jekyll’s designs were couched in her narrative about an authentic Old West Surrey, they drew inspiration from further afield in their reach towards fine art. The English garden of the late-nineteenth-century horticulturalist benefitted from the global reach of empire and from traditions of historic, continental formal gardening. Those who were, like Jekyll, at the forefront of horticultural developments, had a world

⁹³ Jekyll, *Colour in the Flower Garden*, p. 115.

⁹⁴ Jekyll, *Home and Garden*, p. 19; p. 18.

of plants, and a cacophony of architectural forms, to naturalise. The modern country garden was one composed through more narrative movements—more critical sleights-of-hand—to suggest that it was as much an authentic part of old England as its surrounding landscape.

Jekyll's fifteen-acre hub of industry combined spaces dedicated to both solitary repose and the cultivation of the Munstead brand. Away from her private garden (which might also be used to tempt potential clientele), there were workshops, a series of glasshouses, a mushroom house, and test gardens, where Jekyll would trial colour combinations down long borders. There were the nursery gardens for developing Munstead strains, and the kitchen gardens. Jekyll's (mostly) personal garden demonstrated her characteristic combinations of picturesque wilderness and formal planting, although it was hard to tell where working garden ended and personal garden began, as both were cultivated with visual appearance in mind. Any visitor was brought immediately to a 'garden picture'.⁹⁵ They would, Jekyll described, look through to 'lawn and trees and low broad steps, and dwarf dry wall crowned with the hedge of Scotch briars'.⁹⁶ Lawn—planted with local grass species like Sheep's Fescue that Jekyll had identified as 'the kind most abundant in heath-land'—extended North-East to the copse.⁹⁷ This was her woodland garden, decorated with plantings of rhododendrons and azaleas, along lawned avenues and curved paths; ferns, 'pale and rusty' in winter, bracken, and silver birches.⁹⁸ To the north lay garden "rooms": the paved Tank Garden, the North Court, hedged walks of yew. And then there were the seasonal gardens: further rooms dedicated to peonies, primroses, and Michaelmas daisies. There were rock gardens amongst wood, a hidden garden in an ilex grove, drifting spring gardens, a pergola, nut-walk, summerhouse, and the famous main summer border—two-hundred feet long and fourteen-feet wide. These areas were partially screened by softening planting, and bordered with the judicious use of sandstone walling to mirror the Bargate of the house, and so the surrounding Surrey landscape. Amongst this local scene were the

⁹⁵ Jekyll, *Home and Garden*, p. 6.

⁹⁶ Jekyll, *Wood and Garden*, p. 7; p. 8.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

“exotic” outliers: her copse thickets of rhododendron and azalea amongst English woodland (Asiatic acquisitions derived from a century-wide tradition of Royal Horticultural Society sanctioned plant-hunting across East Asia), Mediterranean flora, and subtropics to spot amongst the grand English herbaceous borders.⁹⁹

Unpacking the histories Jekyll told through the garden requires digging into the references contained; doing so demonstrates how she placed herself within modern horticultural society. Whilst the inclusion of “exotic” forms in the “local” garden may appear oxymoronic to contemporary eyes, it should be understood as an essential and expected context to the late-nineteenth-century garden: what was readily available to the English gardener ‘shadowed European commercial and political expansion’.¹⁰⁰ As Elizabeth Hope Chang argues, the plant life about nineteenth-century Englanders ‘was vitally different’ from that surrounding their ancestors—‘by at least the eighteenth century, “much of English nature was now coming from somewhere else”’.¹⁰¹ The period between 1500 and 1839 saw an increase in cultivated plants in the country from around two-hundred to something nearer eighteen thousand.¹⁰² This type of “natural” acquisition was of course, dependent on empire: and dependent too on the appropriative efforts of prolific plant hunters and new methods of plant transportations. New technologies permitted the (frequently illegitimate) movement of hardy plants from locations such as China, Southern Africa, and North America.¹⁰³ Harriet Ritva similarly points to the growing nineteenth-century popularity of the

⁹⁹ For instance, the appropriation of such plants from the Chinese landscape (and sometimes, the Chinese garden itself) initially presented a herbaceous arm to the European fondness for chinoiserie (and the extent of such English horticultural integrations led to the late-eighteenth-century landscape garden being referred to in some French circles as the *Jardin anglo-chinois*). In the first half of the nineteenth century, notorious plant-hunter Robert Fortune was sent by the Royal Horticultural Society to illegitimately collect greater and greater quantities of hoped-for floral rarities from the ‘Flowery Land’ for distribution in British nurseries. These included ‘camelias, azaleas, gardenias ... all natives of China, and most of them better grown’, Fortune argued, ‘and bought to a greater state of perfection in England’. See Elizabeth Hope Chang, *Britain’s Chinese Eye: Literature, Empire, and Aesthetics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), p. 58; Fortune in Chang, p. 58.

¹⁰⁰ Harriet Ritva, ‘Invasion/Invasive’, *Environmental Humanities*, 9 (2017), 171-174 (p. 173).

¹⁰¹ Elizabeth Hope Chang, *Novel Cultivations: Plants in Literature of the Global Nineteenth Century*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2019), p. 1

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

rather-more public Kew Gardens—a demonstration of ‘horticultural imperialism’ she describes as a gardened ‘synecdoche for the entire globe’.¹⁰⁴ Between 1841 and 1857 visitor numbers grew from 9,000-400,000 annually, offering, Ritva concludes, ‘a persuasive index of the appeal to the Victorian public of orderly, predictable, and accurately labelled wilderness’: so well “domesticated” was the idea of the “exotic” cultivar that Ritva suggests that ‘the extent to which eighteenth- and nineteenth-century gardens were occupied by plants that occupied the wildest and most exotic parts of the globe was an indicator of the extent to which those territories and environments had ceased to inspire uneasiness’.¹⁰⁵ The normalcy of cultivars from elsewhere should be stressed if even only to register the naturalisation of empire in the English garden: it did not seem incongruous to Jekyll for rhododendron and Bargate stone to co-exist, because both were already comfortably part of the English garden landscape. So comfortable were these relations that Chang suggests that the volume of transplanted flora formed a ‘second, cultivated nature so omnipresent as to seem at times invisible’, discussing how this “second nature” was narrated and mediated through nineteenth-century novels.¹⁰⁶ Such narrations, she continues, frequently worked to re-signal to the global origins and horticultural skill involved in the acquisition of the modern English landscape, to re-highlight the role of the modern horticulturalist. It was consequently not just that the use of global flora was not contradiction in the country garden, but that the colonial processes of acquisition felt as natural as the plants themselves.

If the inclusion of “exotic” plants in the local garden was par standard, what felt relatively more modern was the late-nineteenth-century turn towards naturalist planting, and away from the geometrical carpet bedding most popular at mid-century: a style popularised by Jekyll and William Robinson, her close friend, horticultural influence, and proprietor of *The Garden*; and read as both a modern break from staid nineteenth-century style, as well as a return to the local landscapes of England offering prime

¹⁰⁴ Harriet Ritva, ‘At the Edge of the Garden: Nature and Domestication in Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century Britain’, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 55 (1992), 368-378 (p. 374).

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 374; p. 371.

¹⁰⁶ Chang, *Novel Cultivations*, p. 1.

inspiration.¹⁰⁷ This was where “nature” dominated—and where Jekyll’s interest in local wood and heath and the English cottage garden proved essential. Exotic cultivars were not to be predictably labelled and laid into formal patterns or geographical arrangements, but picturesquely joined in invocations of local landscape. Blending the garden effectively into surrounding (rural) landscape was perhaps her most all-encompassing tenet: to match her texts’ roaming structure between house, garden, and Surrey, her garden was designed to be enveloped by surrounding wood. Figure 1, a plan of the Munstead gardens published in *Gardens for Small Country Houses*, co-written with architectural historian Lawrence Weaver, illustrates this blurring in practice. Whilst Jekyll planned long border-flanked walks enclosed by sandstone walls and hedges, the southern garden boundaries are impressed only lightly, marked with the suggestion of the woods which continue outside the confines of the diagram; walkways labelled ‘TO THE WOODS’ lead off into white space.¹⁰⁸ There remain no (ostensible) boundaries in Jekyll country, and she obscures where garden ends and wood begins: an impression deliberately cultivated through planting. Rhododendron meets the ‘shade of oaks and birches’ meets groups of ‘beautiful wild ferns’ ‘in the natural setting of mossy ground and whortle-berry, and a complete backing of bracken’.¹⁰⁹ ‘The intention of all the paths from garden to wood’, she concludes, ‘is to lead by an imperceptible graduation from one to the other’: a gardened version of her vision of Old Surrey life.¹¹⁰ And whilst this was her private vision, she was never far from promoting the replication of effects. Figure 2 demonstrates one example: plotting planted woodland with soft, cloudlike groupings of hellebore, holly, and rhododendron. Once again, the drawings trails into the woodland, unbounded. The diagram’s loosely sketched quality furthers the suggestion of the garden softening imperceptibly into Surrey woodland, as if it had always been there.

¹⁰⁷ This is by no means to say that the “naturalist” garden style was an entirely new thing: it was not. Rather, the late-nineteenth-century return to naturalism was read as a new emphasis.

¹⁰⁸ Image reproduced from Gertrude Jekyll and Lawrence Weaver, *Gardens for Small Country Houses* (London: Country Life, 1920), p. 38.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

Figure 1. 'A Garden in West Surrey: General Plan', illustration [redacted for copyright reasons].¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Jekyll and Weaver, *Gardens for Small Country Houses*, p. 38.

Figure 2. ‘Plan of a Group at the Wood-Edge For Winter and Early Spring’, illustration [redacted for copyright reasons].¹¹²

Jekyll’s interpretation of “wild” Surrey gardening was not hers alone, influenced particularly by William Robinson, who did much to popularise the new naturalist gardening style. Robinson’s 1870 *The Wild Garden* was explicitly posed against the nineteenth-century bedding systems ‘seen in all our great public gardens’.¹¹³ These styles, Robinson argued, involved the planting of bright subjects from ‘sub-tropical climates’ in patterned beds at great annual expense.¹¹⁴ Robinson made his own narratives about the historical cultivation of garden flowers, seeing tender bedding plants as a temporary interlude in planting tradition. ‘From about twenty years ago’, he argued, ‘back to the time of Shakespeare, the flowers of an English garden were nearly all hardy ones’ predominantly ‘from climates very like our own’.¹¹⁵ Robinson embeds the acquisition of a different type of “exotics” into English garden tradition: his “wild” gardening borrowed from the ‘immeasurable woodlands’ of worldwide temperate climes. He looked for hardy specimens of types immediately recognisable to the English garden landscape—for ‘brambles’ and ‘lilies’, ‘irises’, ‘foxgloves’ and countless other specimens.¹¹⁶

¹¹² Ibid., p. 43.

¹¹³ William Robinson, *The Wild Garden: Or our Groves and Gardens made Beautiful by the Naturalisation of Hardy Exotic Plants; Being One Way Onwards from the Dark Ages of Flower Gardening, with Suggestions for the Regeneration of the Bare Borders of London Parks* (London: John Murray, 1883), p. 4

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 3.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 2.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 7-8.

The aim was to take ‘the best hardy exotics’ and establish them ‘with the best of our own wild flowers in wild or half-wild spots near our houses and gardens’—then, Robinson argued, ‘we may produce the most charming results ever seen in such places’.¹¹⁷ For Robinson and co., local English gardens were capable of reaching the “most charm”: more, even, than the native origins of the used exotics. Jekyll’s gardens relied on such movements; and she contributed many of her own. She had her own history of plant hunting: despite growing public concern over the habitat destruction of plant-collectors, such activities offered ‘a kind of intoxication’, Jekyll wrote to Robinson from Capri in 1883. It was an intoxication induced by ‘a wilderness of olive and myrtle, orange and prickly pear, and the rough ground clothed with Smilax, Cyclamens and Rosemary’—and then cultivating such acquisitions in the English garden.¹¹⁸ By the end of the century, Jekyll’s selections were being highly awarded by the R.H.S (and distributed through commercial nurseries): a marker of her ability to read contemporary tastes, as well as of her horticultural talent. Once localised into Jekyll’s Surrey scheme, these new cultivations could also be read as beginning their own histories requiring preservation: those both collected from abroad, and that she had selected, like the Munstead Poppies, *Campanula persicifolia*, and a Munstead *Lupinus polyphyllus* were sent to the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew.¹¹⁹ The Munstead name—the Munstead mission—could thus be catalogued for future generations: and be purchased by customers. Snapdragons, foxgloves, primulas and asters, all staples of the cottage garden bearing the Munstead name, could be cultivated in gardens further afield for at least the first three decades of the twentieth-century.

Much of Munstead benefited from Mediterranean flora: speculative schemes abound in Jekyll’s texts, with *Wood and Garden* proposing an aromatic woodland garden, studded with *Cistus*, rosemary,

¹¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 10-11.

¹¹⁸ Jekyll in Michael Tooley, ‘The Plant Nursery at Munstead Wood’, in *Gertrude Jekyll: Essays in the Life of a Working Amateur*, ed. by Michael Tooley and Primrose Arlander (Durham: Michaelmas Books, 1995), pp. 113-126 (p. 116).

¹¹⁹ Michael Tooley, ‘Plants Selected and Bred by Gertrude Jekyll’, in *Essays in the Life of a Working Amateur*, pp. 127-144 (p. 128).

lavender and *Nepeta* against a thyme carpet.¹²⁰ Visitors, she considered, would ‘brush up against the sweet bushes’ ‘as one does on the thinner-clothed of the mountain slopes of southern Italy’.¹²¹ Jekyll linked her use of Rosemary against walls to ‘old bushes quite ten feet high on the garden walls of Italian monasteries’; spotted *Cistus* throughout the garden; and placed cypress amongst Surrey wood. As Graham Scott Thomas has suggested, her characteristic use of grey foliage to anchor herbaceous colour combinations can be understood as ‘a taste acquired from her Mediterranean rambles’: sometimes quite literally.¹²² Beyond Europe and North Africa, Jekyll also favoured subtropical yuccas and cannas, and the eleven-foot Himalayan lily for statement planting. By the turn of the century, cannas were having a moment: first cultivated for ornamental purposes in France in 1848, by 1906, a R.H.S trial had 270 entries vying to be recognised as English cultivars of merit.¹²³ Naturalising tender subtropics demonstrated greater skill, but even those from more temperate climes required careful acclimatising. Jekyll wrote at length on how to replicate the ‘deep beds’ and ‘cool vegetable earth’ of the Eastern Himalayas in preparation for July Surrey growth in ‘poor, shallow soil’.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, successful naturalisation could only result in English effect: when yuccas were in flower, she argued, ‘complete in their splendid dignity of solid leaf and immense spire of ivory bloom’, the owner ‘will rejoice in possessing a picture of perhaps the highest degree of nobility of plant form that may be seen in an English garden’.¹²⁵ Whilst the yucca signalled the geographical reach of English gardens, Jekyll defines it through such gardens first and foremost—and she was to further anglicise its origins. As *Wood and Garden* recounts, her *Yucca filamentosa* had been found in a Surrey cottage garden: the location for many similar plunderings.¹²⁶ Her

¹²⁰ All were aromatics reoccurring through Jekyll’s schemes.

¹²¹ Jekyll, *Wood and Garden*, p. 347.

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 204-205; Jekyll, *Colour in the Flower Garden*, p. 20; p. 32; Graham Scott Thomas, in Tankard and Tooley, p. xiii.

¹²³ Jacquie Gray and Mike Grant, *RHS Plant Trials and Awards: Canna* (London: The Royal Horticultural Society, 2003), p. 2.

¹²⁴ Jekyll, *Wood and Garden*, p. 97.

¹²⁵ Gertrude Jekyll, *Wall and Water Gardens* (London: Country Life, 1901), p. 6.

¹²⁶ Jekyll, *Wood and Garden*, p. 91.

ideal landscape was composed from such localisations—juxtapositions intended to make the best garden pictures.

The Munstead garden picture consisted of localised “exotic” architectural forms as it did flora. As with the juxtaposition of naturally-read planting against anglicised subtropics, notable designers like Jekyll fought to narrate an equally indigenous landscape design history. The disputes raged most memorably between Robinson and architect Reginald Blomfield from the publication of the latter’s *The Formal Garden in England* (1892); and stemmed, as Anne Helmreich argues, from a cultural recognition that the modern garden functioned as a discourse regarding ideals of Englishness, and as such should be designed appropriately.¹²⁷ Opposed to Robinson’s wildernesses, Blomfield advocated a return to the ‘sober classicism of Wren’ and to the seventeenth-century English formal garden, deliberately highlighting the English tradition of formal manor-house gardening over the Italian Renaissance gardens they had themselves heavily borrowed from. He argued that the contrivance at the heart of the landscape garden indicated that architects, not gardeners, should design gardens.¹²⁸

Blomfield had his own historical justification: the eighteenth-century landscape garden was mostly to blame for modern garden failings, and he was also willing to bend his narrative. David Ottewill demonstrates how the illustrations of Jacobean and Elizabethan gardens included in *The Formal Garden* were predominantly modern ‘conjectural reconstructions based on the evidence of seventeenth-and-eighteenth-century books’.¹²⁹ Additionally, Helmreich similarly argues that such narratives, emphasising historic English translative acts over the influence of Italianate source material drew another indigenous heritage: this time, including Renaissance forms, travelling through native medievalisms and

¹²⁷ Anne Helmreich, *The English Garden and National Identity*, p. 2. Helmreich categorises several key design styles between 1870 and 1914—the wild or natural garden, the cottage garden, the formal garden, and the mixed formal and natural—with each proposed as ‘the leading English style, each claiming roots in the local environment and the past’ (p. 11).

¹²⁸ Ottewill, p. 5.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

gothicisms.¹³⁰ Adaptions of Italian taste could then be viewed as much an authentic part of Old England as the vernacular cottage, and the negotiation of new old formal garden narratives as predicated on an anglicised cultural gathering as plant collection.¹³¹

For the most part, Jekyll did not engage publicly with landscape-formalist debate. Nevertheless, she was ‘anointed’ as the ‘standard-bearer’ for the union of formal and natural gardening styles in an anonymous *Spectator* article in 1903, a perception promoted by publications like *Country Life*, predominantly driven by the working relationship shared by Jekyll, Lutyens and Hudson, the periodical’s founder.¹³² In 1896, she had responded directly if cannily: ‘both’, she argued, were right, and both wrong.¹³³ Instead, the garden landscape was ideally formed collaboratively by the architect and the ‘artist-gardener’—an argument alluding to her fruitful relationship with Lutyens, and her writing continued to emphasise both approaches. In *Wall and Water Gardens* (1902), Jekyll summarised Robinson’s position: it was no great surprise, she argued, ‘that our great champion of hardy flowers should put himself into an attitude of general condemnation of the [formal] system’ considering ‘the dull dead-level’ of planting interest dominating the numerous ‘large formal gardens attached to important houses of the Palladian type’.¹³⁴ The ‘old gardens of the Italian Renaissance’, Jekyll continued, offered ideal examples for those ‘equally in sympathy with beautiful plant-life and with the noble and poetical dignity of the most refined architecture’.¹³⁵

¹³⁰ Helmreich, p. 94; See pp. 100-102 for an in-depth discussion of Blomfield’s revisionism.

¹³¹ In addition, in the cultural hunt for a national gardening style, it appeared necessary to narrate a garden history that included the Renaissance: the growing nineteenth-century interest in classical and Renaissance forms across the arts ensured that many wealthy clientele were seeking Italianate forms in their gardens. Signalling to such influences was foundational for “High Renaissance” figureheads like Leighton and G. F. Watts, who held particular cultural capital amongst the artistically minded well-to-do, including Jekyll.

¹³² Helmreich, p. 155.

¹³³ Jekyll in Ottewill, p. 67.

¹³⁴ Jekyll, *Wall and Water Gardens*, p. 142.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

Such Italianate forms were to be naturalised into her Surrey garden, with textual narratives to match her garden translations. Her sumptuous reference text, the 1918 *Garden Ornament*, collects photographs of the Villa d'Este, the Villa Medici, the Villa Gamberaia, and the Villa Lante against English Country House views—predominantly Tudor, Jacobean and seventeenth-century—and against modern examples of good “old” design.¹³⁶ These new-comers were frequently the gardens worked on by herself and Lutyens, the overall text providing another documentary-aesthetic catalogue imposing a lineage from the Renaissance to her own work.¹³⁷ Such translations were continually narrated throughout her texts. *Wall and Water Gardens* moves between Italian gardens and Surrey plans as speculative new Italian schemes are contrasted with Jekyll's own use of local materials at her sandstone tank garden. In *Gardens for Small Country Houses* the pergola moves from ‘a convenient means of growing vines’ ‘into our English way of having it for the display of beautiful climbing plants’, likened to ‘the pleached alleys of our Tudor ancestors’.¹³⁸ Where box signalled the Italianate, yew and hornbeam represented English tradition. Yew appeared emblematic of the development of the pleasure garden, which arrived, according to Jekyll and Weaver, when the windows of ‘great English houses’ ‘might safely look abroad into open country’ rather than having to rely on architectural walls for defensive purposes—‘ancient’ examples could be pointed to at Owlpen Manor and at Cleeve Prior.¹³⁹ However, beyond being translated to read as English, Jekyll's garden features were also to impress a more local character.

The Munstead Wood gardens were signalled to be “local” above all through the inclusion of “rustic” character details. Jekyll's summerhouse was paved taking influence from that method peculiar to a ‘few square miles of West Surrey’: ‘pitched paving’, using a mix of more Bargate and ironstone both

¹³⁶ The text also includes the odd eighteenth-century reference (although not many!) (Gertrude Jekyll, *Garden Ornament* (London: Country Life, 1918).

¹³⁷ Including Hudson's Deanery, Sonning; Hestercombe in Somerset; Orchards, in Godalming; and Goddards, Abinger.

¹³⁸ Jekyll and Lawrence, p. 179; p. 191.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p., 129; p. 131.

quarried within a close circumference.¹⁴⁰ Once again, her design was not copied, but rather a formalised interpretation: pitched stones set in a symmetrical pattern, as opposed to how they were found in the district, in another transformation of source material. Jekyll was fond of such paved references to rural landscape. A sandstone cross ‘marked with shallow ripples, just as sea-sand is marked by the lately ebbed tided’ was set into the North Court paving.¹⁴¹ This ornament, Jekyll noted, had been formed ‘millions of years back’, but was also to be found ‘here and there’ in local Surrey paving, possessing both an ancient geological indigeneity as well as a heritage of incorporation into local architecture.¹⁴² And then there was the insertion of mill stones into the tank garden paving, for a deliberate signal to working life—a feature that would re-occur in many Jekyll and Lutyens gardens.¹⁴³ All could further naturalised into the garden picture through planting. Where ornamental paving provided the base for horticultural display, vertical structures added height. Ruggedly constructed drystone walling, used both in level changes and to divide garden pictures, offered a suitably rustic invocation of imagined village landscapes. Jekyll was so fond of the structures that she dedicated half of *Wall and Water Gardens* (1901) to the subject. Jostling against the Villa d’Este are repeated photographs of “wild” foliage creeping down loosely stoned structures. Reached by rough-hewn steps, and tastefully aged with the right amount of foliage, cultivated walls referenced once again the picturesque cottage buildings populating *Old West Surrey*. Crucially, such references act much as Jekyll’s stock-features, leading her visitors to interpret her publicly posed landscape in a rustic English context, even when they had been designed anew.

In a final narrative twist, Jekyll promoted Munstead as similarly cast with “good” Surrey workers, picturing it as a site within which historic tradition could persist. In *Wood and Garden* (1899), her earliest book, photographs of wood, garden and Surrey landscape are interspersed with pictures of the populace of

¹⁴⁰ Jekyll, *Old West Surrey*, p. 171.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

¹⁴³ Either the pair would, as at Munstead, set an old millstone flush to the paving, or the form of a millstone would be decoratively suggested with other paving materials. Hestercombe provides an example of the former.

Old West Surrey posed within her gardens. ‘Lavender Hedge and Steps to the Loft’ (figure 3) and ‘Hollyhock, Pink Beauty’ (figure 4) imagine two such scenes in the “working” garden.¹⁴⁴ An elderly woman, apparently interrupted from work (or rather posed as if this were the case) appears adorned in what Jekyll would characterise in *Old West Surrey* as ‘the real country dress’ that had begun to be lost by 1860—complete with patterned dress, bonnet, and shawl.¹⁴⁵ She appears dressed uncannily alike the nonagenarian frontispiece for *Old West Surrey*. Jekyll identifies this latter outfit as old Sunday dress, complete with ‘good Sunday bonnet’ and plain large woollen shawl over the handkerchief-shawl Jekyll identifies for everyday use. Such items of Sunday best, she argues, were looked after with ‘greatest care’—bonnets would last ‘almost a lifetime’.¹⁴⁶ It seems unlikely that her “workers” dressed in outdated Sunday best to work, but rather that the photographs from *Wood and Garden* were carefully staged to insist on the continuing rural heritage of Jekyll’s Munstead endeavours. The text in entirety narrates the embeddedness of Jekyll’s gardens with this heritage: presenting, in over seventy photographs, an unenclosed landscape moving imperceptibly from Jekyll’s woodland copse to working cottage landscape. It poses *Old West Surrey* in historic dress against the yuccas; it travels to wood and heath to muse on wild junipers and to photograph the woodman at work.¹⁴⁷ All, Jekyll signals, were part of one landscape: all could be tracked back to that vague and appealing old country, and be cultivated anew in the twentieth century.

¹⁴⁴ Jekyll, *Wood and Garden*, p.

¹⁴⁵ Jekyll, *Old West Surrey*, p. 248.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

¹⁴⁷ Jekyll, *Wood and Garden*, p. 156; p. 159.

Figure 3. Gertrude Jekyll, 'Lavender Hedge and Steps to the Loft', photograph [redacted for copyright reasons].¹⁴⁸

Figure 4. Gertrude Jekyll, 'Hollyhock, Pink Beauty', photograph [redacted for copyright reasons].¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Jekyll, *Wood and Garden*, p. 105.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

From Munstead for All?

The making of Munstead launched Jekyll's career with its vision for preserving a locally understood historic England. *Wood and Garden* alone had immediate impact: six issues its first year, with 13,000 copies sold by its 10th edition.¹⁵⁰ Jekyll's authority had arrived. She catered for the general reader and the artist, with influence felt by rural Bloomsbury, where the traditional rural idyll need not be at odds with modernist experimentation. From 1911-1912—whilst he was preparing for the second *Post-Impressionist Exhibition*—Jekyll was working with Roger Fry on a commission for his own Surrey garden, Durbins. Commentary on the making of Fry's country residence tends to treat Jekyll's role as worth a line-or-two at least, and a couple of paragraphs at most.¹⁵¹ Such narratives appear to suggest her commission as lying at a tangent to Fry's design ethos. 'Although', Maggie Humm states, Fry worked with Jekyll 'the Edwardian garden designer, he populated the garden with Bloomsbury murals and modernist sculpture'.¹⁵² Humm draws a distinction between the aims of the Edwardian garden and the avant-garde artist, even though they co-existed happily in the Durbins scheme. In addition, despite his examination of the line of inheritance through Ruskin, Ashbee's Guild of Handicraft, the Arts and Crafts movement, to Fry, the Omega workshops, and Bloomsbury, Christopher Reed considers Durbins to demonstrate Fry's departure from an 'Arts and Crafts Domestic Aesthetic'.¹⁵³ Why, then, did he choose Jekyll as his plantswoman?

Reed's commentary on Durbins states that it was 'unlike the gardens Jekyll usually designed', eschewing the 'studied informality associated with English tradition in favour of the symmetrical

¹⁵⁰ Festing, p. 161.

¹⁵¹ With the exception of Michael Tooley, who maps out the plants used ('The Plant Nursery at Munstead Wood', p. 123)—nevertheless, the significance of the commission is not expanded upon.

¹⁵² Maggie Humm, 'Bloomsbury and the Arts', in *The Handbook to the Bloomsbury Group*, ed. by Derek Ryan and Stephen Ross (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), pp. 45-59 (p. 49).

¹⁵³ Christopher Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms: Modernism, Subculture, and Domesticity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 39.

plantings that characterized continental Europe'.¹⁵⁴ As Reed continues, 'the garden stepped through a sequence of room-like terraces'; circular stairs and reflecting pools'.¹⁵⁵ But, as established, Jekyll was interested in formal and continental design from the first, as well as in their relation to the English landscape. As noted, in *Wall and Water Gardens*, Jekyll moves freely between classical Italian gardens and rural English localisations. A decade earlier than the making of Durbins, *Wall* proposes sloping plots as being best formed into a series of progressing terraces, informed by the Italianate, lined, as Fry's were, with planting. The text's movements appear to pre-empt the features of Durbins, dwelling on Italianate tanks and lily pools, formal stair design and architectural ornament (albeit not the sculpture of Eric Gill).¹⁵⁶ It was also a garden populated with Jekyll's characteristic colour masses from her favoured plant combinations: from Yuccas, grey-leafed *Santolina*, 'masses of Canterbury bells, purple, white, pink; catmint in great mats'—steps, as Michael Tooley notes, of Bargate stone.¹⁵⁷ And despite Reed's note that the garden was not defined by studied informality, Fry's daughter Pamela wrote in 1915 that everything grew 'in a disorderly luxuriance'.¹⁵⁸ It became a style of gardening Fry adapted for his own uses, informing Vanessa Bell's visual effects at the plot for Charleston in Sussex after it had been rented as a wartime retreat from 1916. Nuala Hancock writes of the shared sensibilities of the Charleston garden scheme (definitively an "artist's garden") and the Jekyll scheme: Bell and artist-companion Duncan Grant favoured the silver and grey foliage grounding the Jekyll garden (*Cynara cardunculus*, Hancock lists, amongst lamb's ears and picturesquely 'statuesque' artichokes) as well as shared 'shocks' of colour.¹⁵⁹ Bell, also 'a consummate colourist', Hancock writes, was praised by sister Virginia Woolf for arrangements of "'pigeon breast" grey against "hot pokers"'—effects not far from the Jekyll border.¹⁶⁰ We cannot forget that Jekyll was not alone in taking significant influence from the colour theories of

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 43.

¹⁵⁵ Reed, p. 43.

¹⁵⁶ Jekyll, *Wall and Water Gardens*, p. 4.

¹⁵⁷ Rose Sidgwick in Tooley, 'The Plant Nursery at Munstead Wood' p. 123; Tooley, 'The Plant Nursery at Munstead Wood', p. 123.

¹⁵⁸ Pamela Fry in Tooley, 'The Plant Nursery at Munstead Wood', p. 123.

¹⁵⁹ Nuala Hancock, *Charleston and Monk's House*, p. 100.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 100.

Michel Chevreul, whose wide influence stretched beyond herbaceous colour experiments to painters like Cézanne and Bell. The gap between Jekyll and Fry—and further, between the great Edwardian garden and the avant-garde—is not so great as assumed. Such a consideration adds an additional, vital context to critical understanding of not just how the Great English garden *par excellence* was formed from careful negotiations with a wide range of artistic contexts and discourses, but also signals to its relevance to more aesthetic cultures typically considered avant-garde and anti-Victorian. It brings to our attention a rich, sometimes incongruous rural England where art posed as explicitly modern could sit in a garden made by a modern gardener nevertheless carefully couching her designs as against modernity, and against the signifiers of modern style. There are many ways to be modern, it seems.

Bell was not Allingham—her work was, for one, included in Fry’s 1912 exhibition amongst Matisse and Cézanne (although not, of course, her paintings of the Charleston gardens, which were to come later). Drawing together such figures nevertheless begins to further populate the rural twentieth-century garden landscape, and provide a further glimpse into how disparate artistic ideals worked and developed amongst country house and garden. Jekyll was not interested in modernist art (her nephew recalls her interpretation of one unnamed 20s “masterpiece” as it saying ‘nothing’ ‘expect that it is ugly and bizarre’), but that did not mean her ideas could not be further translated in a manner compatible with differently modern innovations.¹⁶¹ The narrative of the modern garden idyll was nothing if not malleable. And in any case, the garden narratives made by distinct figures with distinct aims often shared complementary impulses. I have already noted the widespread interest in canonical reappraisal of the arts of the period, and stated how the personal, historiographical garden narrative offered a key method for such reappraisals, extending outward to provide historically informed visions of modern England: Jekyll and Fry’s efforts both fit squarely within this context. And they also share a particular interest in the representation of historic, “primitive” cultures in the making of modern art. As Teukolsky has argued,

¹⁶¹ Festing, p. 271.

Victorian ‘discourses of primitivism’ underpinned Fry’s (and later, Clive Bell’s) justification of post-impressionist art.¹⁶² The Fry of the 1912 Grafton exhibition, collecting decorative “trophy” for the exhibition space, was continuing the popular tradition (the Jekyll tradition) of aestheticising the British working classes as ‘homegrown primitives’.¹⁶³ Even their intentions match up: Fry, Teukolsky continues, aimed to suggest a “good” primitivism founded on human authenticity as opposed to modernity’s mechanical imitations—albeit one which ultimately affirms ‘the superiority of the British critical faculty by theorizing a universalist formalist beauty that British eyes were uniquely endowed to apprehend’.¹⁶⁴ It is hard not to see a shared goal between Jekyll’s picturesque selection of “stock” working class landscape signifiers and Fry’s own gatherings—or between the empire-led hierarchy implied in both stocking and then promoting the great modern English garden (the only site, we are reminded, capable of producing “the most charm”); and the shock of the great modern English exhibition (appearing capable, we are also reminded, of changing human character altogether).¹⁶⁵

Such similarities are less surprising when we consider that the early Fry had shared with Jekyll an interest in Ruskin, English domestic architecture, and local handicraft. Necessary work, like Reed’s and Teukolsky’s, has drawn together the aims and aesthetics of Victorian and modernist art writing and ornamentation to trace lines of development across the turn-of-the-century to overturn oppositional narratives pitting “the modern” against “the historic” —or, at the very least, the modern against “the Victorian”. Such transitions did not just stop. When Jekyll’s Country Life Books collaborator Christopher Hussey wrote *The Picturesque: Studies in a Point of View* (1927), he tracked what he saw as the modern development from eighteenth-century landscape picturing to modernist aesthetics. For Hussey, “picturesqueness” was so embedded in late-Victorian culture that he began his study recounting a

¹⁶² Teukolsky, p. 193.

¹⁶³ Ibid., pp. 201-203.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 225; p. 195.

¹⁶⁵ Virginia Woolf, ‘Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown’, in *Selected Essays*, ed. by David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 32-46 (p. 38).

childhood realisation—a realisation that the ways he had been taught to see had a name. Encountering the named picturesque, Hussey argued, ‘awoke such surmises such a grandchild of mine might experience on finding books called *Mr. Roger Fry on the Plastic* or *Bell’s Significance*’.¹⁶⁶ For the 1920’s Hussey, the cultural influence of the picturesque had been neatly taken over by Fry & co, with the former providing the ‘first step in the movement towards abstract aesthetic values’, consisting of ‘the education of the eye to recognize qualities that painters had previously isolated’.¹⁶⁷ Jekyll’s gardens—what we might consequently term Jekyll’s picturesque—were literally present during Hussey’s period switch, and should not be discounted from the critical narrative on the diverse development of modern aesthetics. Rather, the garden historiography recontextualises the scenes and aims of modern art. Perhaps this narrative capacity—this ability to display a history of sorts—was the greatest draw of all. It was, after all, a tactic also shared by a range of gardeners of the period. Hancock goes on to describe the Charleston gardens, and those made nearby at Monk’s House by Leonard Woolf, as ‘museal gardens—gardens which carry biographical and historical narratives’.¹⁶⁸ Jekyll provided one particularly seductive blueprint for such plots, but she also popularised the garden as narrative: a narrative which insisted upon preserving an old and native heritage, and retrofitting it for a modern age.

For beyond the avant-garde, Jekyll’s localised garden narratives were, by the Great War, popularly correlated with ‘the English ideal’, and her work was not over.¹⁶⁹ Her gardening was inevitably interrupted in wartime—her masterful long border, perhaps the all-time highlight of Jekyll gardening, turned over to potatoes. She purchased pullets for egg production (many of which were intended for the temporary military hospital at Thorncombe Park, Bramley); continued to promote landscape gardening for women and productive planting resourcefulness across *Country Life*; as well as being engaged on her

¹⁶⁶ Christopher Hussey, *The Picturesque: Studies in a Point of View* (London: Frank Cass, 1967), p. 2.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 17.

¹⁶⁸ Hancock, p. 92.

¹⁶⁹ Sarah Joiner, ‘Evolution of the Planting Influences of the Imperial War Graves Commission from its Inception to the Modern Day’, *Garden History*, 42 (2014), 90-106 (p. 92).

own ways to memorialise the war dead.¹⁷⁰ She got involved with the national push to acquire land for public memory: publicising the National Trust's attempted acquisition of ninety-two acres of heathland at Hydon Ball—two miles from Munstead—£1,600 of the purchase price was raised locally, with Jekyll later engaged on the appropriate planting of pathways.¹⁷¹ Crucially, despite the disruptions of war, her planting strategies continued informing twentieth-century garden culture. As Sarah Joiner notes, she was even consulted by Lutyens for the planting of his planned memorial cemeteries with the Imperial War Graves Commission.¹⁷² The eventual planting was planned to embed within the countryside where cemeteries were located, and include 'soft' colours provided by recognisable English blooms, regardless of their frequent location on the continent (many cultivars consequently did not fare well in Italy).¹⁷³ Joiner remains rightly cautious about the extent of Jekyll's contribution: however, it is nevertheless likely that her ideas informed the eventual schemes tasked with aiding the remembrance of Commonwealth war casualties, as such localised herbaceous strategies remain familiar to the popularised Jekyll garden picture, even if they were not explicitly planned by her. And in any case, in December 1917, '1,800 clones of white thrift were lifted from Munstead's sandy soil' for transportation to France.¹⁷⁴ Here, then, finally, could Munstead really be used to preserve all that had been lost, and could not come again.

¹⁷⁰ Festing, p. 254.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 253

¹⁷² As Joiner notes, Jekyll's planting plans remain at the University of California, Berkeley, despite there being no official record of her collaboration with the commission (p. 92).

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

¹⁷⁴ Festing, p. 261.

2 | Interweaving Greens: Pattern and Promotion in Mary Watts' Artist's Village

In April 1891, five miles from Munstead, construction began on Limmerslease at the edge of the village of Compton: the Arts and Crafts 'country cottage' of Royal Academician George Watts and his Scottish portraitist wife, Mary Fraser Tytler.¹ It had been first intended as a rural accompaniment to the pair's dwelling in the fashionable Holland Park: a winter residence to lessen the effects of London on G. F.'s delicate constitution. However, the couple's residency also led to a community pottery (developing over four-hundred terracotta designs from 1898); a new rural gallery for George's work (1903); and the design of the Compton mortuary chapel (1898-1904), now summarised as 'one of the masterpieces of Art Nouveau'.² All were projects spearheaded by Mary. In 1886, she married the sixty-nine-year-old George at a comparatively young age of thirty-six, transitioning to work in the decorative arts, and attempting to secure George's Symbolist aesthetic legacy as the art world moved on after his 1904 death. This chapter argues that Mary's additions to Compton village should be read as a material example of reputation maintenance: a biographical project insisting upon George's relevance through the cultivation of an artist's village. Landscaping was central to the success of her "village", as she gardened house to studio to workshop, gallery, chapel, and finally, to the surrounding landscape.

There is no scholarship on the subject of Mary's gardens, beyond Judith W. Page and Elise L. Smith's recent commentary on the Limmerslease plot as part of a chapter on Watts for *Women, Literature and the Arts of the Countryside in Early-Twentieth-Century England* (2021), which judges the grounds as demonstrating typical Arts and Crafts style—moving from more formal areas closer to the house before blurring with external woodland.³ Page and Smith provide a useful introduction to the contexts and

¹ The Watts Gallery Archives [TWGA], Ronald Chapman and Peter Chapman, 'Limmerslease', p. 39.

² Richard Ormond, 'Foreword', in *Mary Watts: Unsung Heroine of the Art Nouveau*, ed. by Veronica Gould (Guildford: Watts Gallery, 1998), p. 7.

³ Judith L. Page and Elise L. Smith, *Women, Literature, and the Arts of the Countryside in Early-Twentieth-Century England* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021), p. 117.

sources relevant to Mary's gardens, rightly considering them one part of Mary's decorative use of symbolic reference to plant forms, which they argue 'developed out of her persistent desire to acknowledge nature as a foundation for spiritual renewal'.⁴ However, their centring on the natural (whilst an essential context to Mary's art-making) bypasses a deeper consideration of the importance of landscaping to her cultivations of an artist's village, and to making a place to maintain George's reputation and situate her own. By moving beyond identifying Compton gardens as merely generally Arts and Crafts (a retrospective label used to identify a particular type of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century garden style), we can push into the underexplored contexts of Mary's Compton self-placing. Whilst Limnerslease should be read amongst developing high-design contexts, Mary's garden history project also builds narratives between Limnerslease and the contexts of the high Victorian Artist's Studio and the working retreat. Her attempt to promote a gardened Artist's village, consisting of village industry, gallery, and memorial chapel, makes Limnerslease a fascinating example of the country garden's capacity for self-placing life and art in modern England.

Watts was a keen diarist, recording garden developments against days spent with George. Many of the latter entries were written up in her three-volume (somewhat uncritical) biography, *George Frederick Watts: The Annals of an Artist's Life* (1912)—likewise, much of the Compton estate remained, shrine-like, much as it had been from George's death to Mary's own in 1938. Close attention to Mary's diaries, alongside private photographs and those published in periodical articles about the Watts Gallery and Compton Potteries, permits us also to read her cultivation of Compton village as a landscaped biographical project. Whilst Mary's gardens were not examples of "high design" as embodied by those of her friend and near-neighbour Jekyll at Munstead Wood, her close attention to landscape observation, and her intention to cultivate a rural artist's retreat worthy of G. F's aspirations towards 'the utmost for the

⁴ Ibid., p. 111.

highest', demonstrate her own, equally significant system of garden aesthetics.⁵ There are crossovers between the Compton gardens and Jekyll's own: both Jekyll and Mary paid close attention to the appearance of landscape; both were concerned with narrative translations of historic source; both were building their Surrey residences within the 1890s within five miles of one another—and both were painters and craftswomen enamoured with West Surrey, moving within overlapping social circles and with the Arts and Crafts movement, with an artistic education, and who possessed indebtednesses to varying degrees to Turner, Ruskin, and G. F. Watts. For both, cultivating landscape was essential to the situation of successful careers. However, where Jekyll promotes a particular vision of Surrey that pretends at history, Watts' explicitly symbolic garden landscapes are most concerned with embedding Wattsonian activities within local landscape. They are also formed through Mary's interest in pattern. Running through her gardens—through the landscaping of her domestic garden, workshop, gallery, and chapel—are the twist and turns of Mary's 'interweaving greens'.⁶ These curling vines, replicated from the South West Surrey woodland, represent her attempts to self-place life and art within an all-encompassing, understandable pattern knitting her to the landscape, and her art to history. Beyond the cultivation of a landscape within which to launch a successful career, lay a distinct aesthetic philosophy taken directly from her keen observations of Surrey landscape. Mary's gardens were invested with a symbolism complementary to G. F.'s, but benefitting most from study of Celtic motif, which, as she wrote in a 1901 letter to a fellow Scot, 'is our own, & was left incomplete': one to work with not as 'copyists', but to 'invent upon' as a 'modern' 'language'.⁷

⁵ One Who Knew Him, 'George Frederick Watts, R.A., O.M.', *The English Illustrated Magazine*, August 1904, pp. 520-522 (p. 520); for commentary on G. F. Watts, see Veronica Gould, *G. F. Watts: The Last Great Victorian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); *G. F. Watts: Victorian Visionary Highlights from the Watts Gallery Collection*, ed. by Mark Bills and Barbara Bryant (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); *Representations of G. F. Watts: Art Making in Victorian Culture*, ed. by Colin Trodd and Stephanie Brown (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2004).

⁶ TWGA, Mary Watts, 'Diary 1891', 18 June 1891.

⁷ Mary Watts to James Morton in Gould, p. 17.

The ultimate plan was to cultivate an artist's village to provide a materially persisting reference to the Watts' work. Recent studies have demonstrated the pair's marriage as being reciprocally useful to their (complementarily posed) artistic careers, with Melanie Unwin suggesting that by taking up the role of the eminent artist's wife, Mary was also able to negotiate a place to develop her own talents against George's prestige.⁸ She was also able to position herself as the predominant arbiter of his reputation, to the extent that the *Annals* remain a predominate source on his life and art. Whilst Mary's accounts of their partnership minimised her contributions, and whilst her own aesthetic positions have to be carefully extrapolated from her biography of George, the landscaped reputation-management of her artist's village primed her incursions onto the modern art market. Mary's more recent positioning amongst Art Nouveau demonstrates (overdue) critical recognition of the particular modernity of her project, and of her novel combinations of wide-reaching sources.⁹ These included the Celtic, her translation of classical motif into English clay, and her eclectically styled interests in craft-revival, (inter)national symbolism, vernacular pattern, and natural landscape. However, regardless of her modernity, there is another unexamined context for her decorative works: their literal position in the garden. The bulk of her commercial designs were first garden ornaments: terracotta pots, sun dials, well-facings, and statues. They were also made in a landscape styled through the garden—a garden integral to their making.

Finding Interweaving Greens: The Beginning of Limmerslease

The Watts were introduced to Compton as a couple in 1887. They were quickly seduced by its particularly local “charm” that appeared both individually rural whilst maintaining a distinctly ‘English character’.¹⁰ Mary recorded in her diary a countryside ‘so various’—and in mid-August, profuse with ‘red

⁸ Melanie Unwin, ‘Significant Other: Art and Craft in the Career and Marriage of Mary Watts’, *Journal of Design History*, 17 (2004), 237-250 (p. 237); see also Lucy Ella Rose, ‘The Creative Partnership of Mary and George Watts’ in *The Making of Mary Seton Watts*, ed. by Mary McMahon (Guildford: Watts Gallery, 2013), pp. 41-50.

⁹ See *Mary Watts: Unsung Heroine of the Art Nouveau*, ed. by Veronica Gould (Guildford: Watts Gallery, 1998).

¹⁰ TWGA, Mary Watts, Diary 1897, 14 August 1897.

brown dogberry’ and ‘bright green briony’ climbers.¹¹ The mild winter of 1888 saw their return, and more long walks (G. F. wanted to study the structure of bare hedgerows for the background of *Patient Life of Unrequited Toil*, 1890-1891), before finding the well-wooded sandy knoll that would become Limnerslease. This was still Old West Surrey, but at the northern edge of Jekyll country, which, as previously discussed, was bounded by ‘the long chalk line of the Hog’s Back’: a tall ridge part of the North Downs, running between the Surrey towns of Farnham and Guildford, and topped with an ancient road.¹² Limnerslease was built around one mile south of this geological marker, amongst heath, down, and woodland—and it was a landscape that continued to excite. Mary recorded the blues and purples of March heath, the ‘glittering white walls’ of chalk pits and ‘dark bent yews, in their eternal green, grasping the cliff edge’; the ‘shining veil’ of woodland after April rain; the ‘gold & green’ June growth with purple shade and blue milkwort underfoot, and those all-important ‘interweaving greens’.¹³ The village of Compton provided additional stimulus (the gardens ‘gay with every sort of flower’) and a local historic community prime for development: ‘velvet moss’ stained old bricks and villagers alike, and Virginia creeper, appearing like ‘stained glass’, turned cottage walls crimson, and was to be incorporated on her own grander constructions.¹⁴ Old West Surrey had found another interpreter in Mary, and was to provide another base for life, art, and narrative.

As at Munstead, the initial gardens at Limnerslease were laid out to cultivate a sense of naturalist cohesion with Surrey woodland. Mary’s 1891 diaries record her process: far from herbaceous borders, her early thoughts were for paths to ‘wind about & the brambles grow & twine, & white foxgloves come up in the bracken’.¹⁵ Her lyrical proposition demonstrates her early interest in pattern whilst also showing an awareness of late-Victorian naturalism, with foxgloves amongst bracken a standard staple in the

¹¹ Ibid., 30 August 1897.

¹² Jekyll, *Old West Surrey*, p. vii.

¹³ TWGA, Mary Watts, Diary 1891, 24 March 1891; 4 April 1891; 16 June 1891; 18 June 1891.

¹⁴ TWGA, Mary Watts, Diary 1891, 19 April 1891; 20 July 1891; TGWA, Mary Watts, Diary 1893, 11 January 1893; TGWA, Mary Watts, Diary 1891, 21 September 1891; 9 November 1891.

¹⁵ TGWA, Mary Watts, Diary 1891, 12 January 1891.

Munstead wood, as well as Robinson's *Wild Garden*¹⁶. Such similarities continued in text: where Mary envisages lilies and roses shining in front of yews 'like gems', Jekyll would describe in *Wood and Garden* 'masses of pure white lily' 'against the dark, solid greenery of the Yew—and the brilliant flowers above are like little gems aflame'.¹⁷ Progressive garden developments continued to emphasise the curling encroachments of pre-existing wood. An oak fence rose, blending with the mix of scrub oak and fir (the plot, now somewhat enclosed, 'had altogether the look of a garden now')—and then there was the all-important shrubbery.¹⁸ There were the aforementioned yews to place, along with hollies, junipers, laurels, rhododendrons, and azaleas: all staples for the modern country house garden. The 12th of April saw Mary consider the placing of soon-to-arrive shrubs; the 13th, their arrival. Soon after ten o'clock, the first yew was planted, with Mary standing by feeling she 'must be the Priest for the moment, swinging a censer of praise & prayer'.¹⁹ August saw bulb-preparation, and consideration of 'what may or may not be when they send out their glorious cups'; 'worshipping', 'as one buries the brown roots in hopes of a glorious resurrection'.²⁰ This gardening was imbued with reverence: Mary's intention was to integrate not just the garden with the wider landscape, but to take spiritual and aesthetic succour from the landscape as she maintained George's artistic reputation and cultivated a place for her own.

In October, she set to break line between garden and wood; planned box; planted heather; marked shrub catalogues; placed more yew, ivy, sweet briars, broom, clematis, honeysuckle, Virginia Creeper, dogwood, American brambles, and common barberries. The mature scheme was more variable than Mary's diaries suggest: the southern side of the house flanked by terracotta pots of bays (made by Mary), clumps of brambles, and great blue Scots firs with great red trunks; and on the northern side was the lower lawn, patterned with shrubs, a terracotta bench under an elm 'too cold and damp to sit on'; a yew

¹⁶ See Page and Smith, p. 114.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 23 October 1891; Jekyll, *Wood and Garden*, p. 106.

¹⁸ TGWA, Mary Watts, Diary 1891, 26 March 1891.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 13 April 1891.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 22-25 August 1891.

hedge that would grow so large by the mid-twenties that a child could walk through the middle.²¹ In 1902, the Watts purchased a series of farm buildings at the nearby Down Farm to make a sculpture studio for George: this was also transformed into a blooming formal garden.²² The drive was framed by a beech and fir avenue, and was flanked to the left by an orchard screened from the north lawn by yews. Vegetables were hedged with box and ‘discreetly hidden’ by espalier fruit trees.²³ All was encompassed within woodland: bracken, ivy and thick coverings of brambles and honeysuckle and broom. And whilst Mary’s diaries were focused on her wood, the make-up of her herbaceous borders can be speculatively suggested from sketches for the Holland Park gardens. Mary favoured dahlias, white lilies and rose beds, veronicas, columbines, hollyhocks, delphiniums, lobelia, stocks and canterbury bells, daisies, tulips, anemones and eryngiums.²⁴ All were stock characters from the English cottage border—and in a familiar twist, were punctuated by “exotic” interlopers—spots of cactus and canna. So far, so familiar.

Like the making of Munstead, the gardening of Limnerslease was in the midst of unfolding garden design debate. Developing over 1891, it was neatly positioned between the 1890 publication of landscapist Henry Ernest Milner’s *The Art and Practice of Landscape Gardening*—a text suggesting, fittingly for Mary, that garden lawns should appear as a ‘growing glade in a wood’; and the opposing 1892 publication of Blomfield’s *The Formal Garden in England*.²⁵ Limnerslease’s early landscaping did not share the same emphasis on architectural treatment as was emerging in contemporary texts, despite the formal push being progressively made by garden-architects associated with the Art Worker’s Guild and wider Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society—circles increasingly familiar to Mary.²⁶ In Compton, the

²¹ TWGA, Ronald Chapman and Peter Chapman, ‘Limnerslease’, p. 61.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 61.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

²⁴ See the New Little Holland House garden sketches, TWGA.

²⁵ Henry Ernest Milner, *The Art and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent, and Co., 1890), p. 36; the making of Limnerslease also fell in the same year as architect J. D. Sedding’s 1891 translation of Arts and Crafts sentiment for the garden in *Garden-Craft Old and New*—a book emphasising the formal garden but nevertheless mentioned briefly but with appreciation by Mary in a December 1891 diary entry.

²⁶ Whilst Ernest George took on the house, Clough William-Ellis was commissioned for additional Compton cottages, and Christopher Turnor for the gallery; and Robert Lorimer (familiar with Lutyens’ Surrey vernacularisms) was commissioned in 1902 to make further additions to Aldourie Castle. Lorimer had commented that Munstead

historical revivalism common to *fin-de-siècle* formalism was first figured through the wilder elements of the plot. First and foremost, Mary's landscape was an old woodland to be read in a tradition of artist's gardens, and the Watts' made their own commentaries on naturalist gardening. One of G. F.'s final landscape paintings, the 1903 *A Parasite*—a portrait of tree trunk with ivy covering—presents a pictorial take on the naturalist-formal debate, offering a markedly less loose handling of paint and light than his other late landscapes centred on Compton wilds.²⁷ Garden writers typically highlighted the invasive nature of ivy as a decorative climber (whilst Jekyll might glory at the 'thick clusters' of ivy-berries tangling up a trunk or 'wall six feet high', she would also caution at taking its 'pictorial quality' too far to avoid structural damage or an impression of general untidiness).²⁸ The Watts were to make full use of its decorative qualities, planting 'long trails of ivy over the oak fence' to further disguise garden boundaries; in one case, even decoratively planting up a fallen tree alongside ferns 'stolen' from nearby heath and 'emerald green cushions of moss'.²⁹ Whilst both were profoundly engaged with the cultivation of a "wilder" landscape, George was especially enamoured: dealing with a 'half-strangled yew', Mary wrote, had to be carefully approached, so as to avoid marital friction.³⁰ In painting, Watts aestheticised such climbers as an inevitable part of the wild garden. However, whilst *A Parasite* might nominally highlight the parasitic dynamic between climbing plant and historic tree, it also demonstrates the Wattsian view of the reciprocity of high art and gardening cultures.

In deference to Mary's Scottish heritage, the Surrey landscape was also aestheticised in reference to historic Scottish design and its associated figures. The Watts were smitten with the historic romances

Wood looked so 'beautiful that you feel that people may have been making love and living and dying there ... for the last—I was going to say thousand years, anyway six-hundred', an impression he attributed to the use of old tiles; the proportion ('coursed rubble with thick joints and no corners'); and most importantly, 'that it had been built by the old people of the old materials in the old "unhurrying way" but at the same time "sweet for all modern uses"'. Robert Lorimer in Peter Savage, *Lorimer and the Edinburgh Craft Designers* (Edinburgh: Paul Harris, 1980), p. 25.

²⁷ Including *End of the Day (Surrey Woodland)* (1902-1903); *Surrey Woodland* (1902-1903); *Autumn* (1901-1903); and *Green Summer* (1903).

²⁸ Jekyll, *Wood and Garden*, p. 20; Jekyll, *Wall and Water Gardens*, p. 25; pp. 54-56.

²⁹ TGWA, Mary Watts, Diary 1891, 18 April 1891; 12 November 1891.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 18 October 1891.

of Sir Walter Scott, who had been equally engaged with the appropriate treatment of the historic garden in the early nineteenth century (and had also been a friend of Mary's great grandfather, Lord Woodhouselee).³¹ The 1823 *Quentin Durward* was introduced by Scott's own discussion of the fate of old English gardens under Regency landscapist tastes.³² In a footnote, Scott directs his reader to Price's *Essay on the Picturesque*, and to the destruction of 'an ancient sequestered garden' 'at the dictate of an improver'—containing 'yew hedges' and its own 'secluded wilderness'.³³ In 1828 Scott supplied 'Landscape Gardening' for the *Quarterly Review*—'nothing is more completely the child of art than a garden', he argued: 'the shapes and forms of shrubs, creepers and flowers' made up 'the most beautiful of nature's works, and to collect them and arrange them with taste is the proper and rational purpose of art'.³⁴ He moved to remember his own former Kelso residence, possessing a garden 'full of long straight walks betwixt hedges of yew and hornbeam'; 'thickets of flowering shrubs', and a 'bower'.³⁵ On a later visit, 'the whole character of the place had been destroyed': the hedges 'cut down; the trees stubbed up', the 'place of impressive and solemn retreat' lost for good.³⁶ It was a reflection that Mary would find personally relevant in the coming years, feeling progressively separated from her own childhood Scottish garden at Aldourie Castle, close to the southern banks of Loch Ness: a landscape enveloped in more interweaving greens; in 'burn' and 'bonny dell'.³⁷

Ottewill reads Scott's formal tastes as similarly informed by his native Scottish landscape—with a 'climate and wild terrain' unhelpful to the Brownian landscape garden; rather, the 'Scottish Pleasance'

³¹ Gould, *Mary Watts*, p. 21.

³² Scott's essay was brought on by an imaginary visit to the remains of an 'ancient' French chateau—featuring terraces, steps, 'architectural embellishments' and 'accompanying parterres of rich flowers'—demonstrating, despite its state of disrepair, how 'actively Art had been here employed to decorate Nature', and leading Scott to bemoan 'the fickleness of fashion' which he read as leading to the loss of such scenes in England (Walter Scott, *Quentin Durward* (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1918), p. 25).

³³ Scott, *Quentin Durward*, p. 26, n. 1.

³⁴ Walter Scott, 'Article XV. On Landscape Gardening', in *The Miscellaneous Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.*, 28 vols (Edinburgh: Robert Cadell; London: Houlston & Stoneman, 1848), XXI, pp. 77-151 (p. 84; p. 85; p. 84).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

³⁷ TGWA, Mary Watts, Diary 1891, 14 February 1891.

combined sheltered enclosure with the cultivation of rugged scenery and demonstrated a continued favouring towards formal architecture.³⁸ Consequently, the gardens at Scottish country houses were less likely to bow to the fashion for the English landscape garden—and the seventeenth century continued as a model for the late-nineteenth-century Scottish country house garden. It was a strategy Scottish Arts and Crafts garden-architect Robert Lorimer displayed from the earliest of his own garden designs in the country—with formal structures bedecked with ‘yew, rose trellises and flower beds edged with box’.³⁹ In 1902, Lorimer was tasked with the sympathetic expansion of Aldourie Castle. First recorded as a laird’s house in 1625, Aldourie was greatly expanded by William Fraser-Tytler in the 1860s, ‘parading the full repertoire of early C 17 Baronialism’: due to its imaginative expansion over the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by ‘a procession of pre-eminent Scottish architects’, it is now considered ‘an exceptional example of 19th century Baronial architecture’.⁴⁰ The gardens have also recently received national recognition, and are now part of the Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes in Scotland, partially due to their association with Mary, who painted watercolour landscapes of castle and parkland at the edge of Loch Ness; amongst the surrounding woodland made up from a significant nineteenth-century tree collection; and against the rising topographies of Drumashie Moor.⁴¹ Recent surveys highlight that alongside parkland and arboretum, there were high yew hedges; a Victorian walled kitchen garden; formal gardens ornamented with serpentine paths and high-Victorian carpet bedding; and a great deal of *rhododendron ponticum* that spent much of the twentieth-century steadily taking over the landscape.⁴²

³⁸ Ottewill, p. 39.

³⁹ Lorimer in Ottewill, p. 40; p. 41; see also Savage, 1980.

⁴⁰ John Gifford, *The Buildings of Scotland: Highlands and Islands* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 148; Historic Environment Scotland, *Aldourie Castle*, <<https://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/LB535>> [accessed 20 July 2020].

⁴¹ Historic Environment Scotland, *Inventory Garden & Designed Landscape: Aldourie Castle*, <<https://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/GDL00011>> [accessed 17 December 2021]; see also Gould, *Mary Watts*, p. 29.

⁴² *Ibid*; Historic Environment Scotland’s Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscape in Scotland recognises designed landscapes of national importance, assessing each site’s relative artistic, historical, horticultural, architectural, archaeological, scenic, and nature conservation area interest (Historic Environment Scotland, *Scotland’s Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes* (5 May 2021) <<https://www.historicenvironment.scot/archives-and-research/publications/publication/?publicationId=7c365ace-e62d-46d2-8a10-a5f700a788f3>> [accessed 17 December 2021].

The Aldourie grounds can be read as demonstrating that mix of formal enclosure and rugged landscape Ottewill suggests as integral to the Scottish pleasance; a style influencing both eminent garden architects like Lorimer, and Watts' cultivation of English heathland. In 1898, buoyed by positive reception to the Earls Hall gardens near Edinburgh, and inspired by the historic Edzell castle gardens in Angus, Lorimer gave a talk on Scottish Gardens to the Edinburgh Architectural Association.⁴³ He praised a modern design approach informed by historic Scottish gardens: 'the natural park' ran 'up to the walls of the house on the one side', he theorised, and 'on the other you stroll right out into the garden inclosed'[sic]; and he dwelt on the garden as spiritual sanctuary.⁴⁴ 'The garden', he argued, 'is a little pleasance of the soul, by whose wicket the world can be shut out from us'.⁴⁵ Lorimer's description of ideal Scottish garden organisation can be read as both an apt description of the Aldourie gardens, and as partially summarising Mary's strategy, with the south side given over to woodland, and the northern side yews, shrubberies and boxed parterres.

The similarity is likely due to the importance of Aldourie's old forms to Mary, and not because she and Lorimer were in correspondence. Their love for the heritage of the Scottish country house garden had distinct ends: Mary's enclosure was not in high stone walls, but in interweaving greens; and, as shortly discussed, whilst Limnerslease was a landscape of spiritual retreat, it was not a place in which the outside world was shut out. On visits home Mary dwelt most on the wilder flora of Scotland: the profusion of bluebells, lady's bedstraw, and briar brush on the moors—lamenting any change to the castle garden. The loss of hollies seemed unavoidable (rabbits had eaten them one hard winter), but less forgivable was her sister cutting down 'two splendid beeches on the approach to the house', and the 'stately pine stems too that make the first long approach to the drive [had] been cut & hacked, & and great

⁴³ Ottewill, p. 44. It was later published in the *Architectural Review*.

⁴⁴ Lorimer in Ottewill, p. 44.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

spaces like teeth drawn from a beautiful face'.⁴⁶ It is a lament on lost character reminiscent of Scott's own. In remedy, at Limmerslease oaks were felled in favour of Scots pines, and a line of beech and pines planned to accompany the Surrey driveway. In addition to the cultivation of briar, woodland and heath, 'dear Aldourie eryngiums' were delivered to stud the borders, and, for further commemoration, 'Aldourie snowdrops' to plant at the 'earthly house' of her late Aunt Bessie; 'Aldourie ferns and flowers from the dell' for George's funeral.⁴⁷ Whilst the cultivation of Limmerslease may have predominately been about persistence, the gardens also allowed Mary to reimagine beloved landscapes of her past.

Perhaps most of all, the Limmerslease gardens should be read as informed by the development of the Watts' artistic partnership, which fed into the Limmerslease landscaping. The felling of trees was especially contentious, and had to be argued with George. 'Much more', Mary punned after the removal of two scrub oaks, 'was needed to deliver all the beauty and capability of the place', in a manner reminiscent of landscapist "Capability" Brown.⁴⁸ She appears more invested in the overall garden composition than George, who found her 'ways with shrubs and trees barbarous'—with Mary narrating his sensitivity to the later 'execution' of two small mushroom oaks, needed to break up 'the green wall' on the South side of the house. G. F. 'got into Lady Ethel Yorke's chair with the blind well over the south window, & his back to it, while the execution went on'.⁴⁹ For Mary, the culling was a success, revealing three Scots firs: 'the composition of their lines so wonderful to my eye—the beauty of their green, & their red stem'.⁵⁰ In October, she described picturesquing-up the yew: 'the hard hedge line between the garden & the wood is being broken into, which gives me pleasure, which Signor rather damps'.⁵¹ Ironically, upon taking charge, he continued to remove more than she had planned, and worse, had 'cut & kept so sharp &

⁴⁶ TGWA, Mary Watts, Diary 1893, 12 July 1893.

⁴⁷ TGWA, Mary Watts, Diary 1893, 12 July 1893; Diary 1904, 8 March 1893; Diary 1904, 4 July 1904; Diary 1891, 4 July 1891.

⁴⁸ TGWA, Mary Watts, Diary 1891, 12 January 1891.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 21-22 July 1891.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 22 August 1891.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 17 October 1891.

shaved a line about the house’—the opposite of Mary’s intended naturalistic blurring of house, garden and woodland.⁵² In any case, he appeared keen to keep their discussion of trees to the realm of landscape painting. On one occasion, as Mary probed the fate of surplus trees, George talked instead of Turner, Ruskin, and Titian:

“I was thinking about the trees” I said “at Limmers” —”oh, I thought you meant Ruskin’s trees. You must take care to bear in mind in reading *Modern Painters* that he is writing of landscape painting only, otherwise he would seem to imply that Titian is not as great as Turner”.⁵³

Mary neglects to comment, only recording Watts’ views on *Modern Painters*—perhaps signalling his continual concern for “higher” matters than gardening. As she does, she demonstrates that their domestic lives were as concerned with the cultivation of gardens as aesthetic schema; it is also likely that her transcription was made with the future writing of his biography in mind. However, the inclusion of her own remark is curiously ambiguous: it is not necessary to the documentation of his understanding of *Modern Painters*. It might consequently be read as suggesting the different end-point of the pair’s aesthetics: whilst George’s landscapes dealt predominantly in reaching ideas, Mary was more interested in the idealistic manipulation of landscaped forms.

The Watts frequently discussed Turner (and Ruskin’s reading of Turner), George placing him second in artistic importance to the sixteenth-century Titian, due to his perceived inability to paint trees with equal proficiency (George’s admiration for the Renaissance master was so infamous as to be satirised in Woolf’s 1935 *Freshwater*, where his feverish description as the modern ‘Titian. Titian. Titian’ is interpreted by an outsider as a series of sneezes).⁵⁴ These conversations also appear in Mary’s diaries. ‘Ruskin’, she notes, ‘says Turner was the first to perceive that shadows are scarlet’, a remark that George

⁵² Ibid., 17 October 1891.

⁵³ Ibid., 16 January 1891.

⁵⁴ Virginia Woolf, *Freshwater: A Comedy*, ed. by Lucio P. Ruotolo (London: The Hogarth Press, 1976), p. 22.

says he ‘never could appreciate’, feeling instead that there were only two colours running through nature—yellow, ‘the colour of light’, and blue, ‘the colour of atmosphere’.⁵⁵ She elsewhere directly summarises their different interpretations of Turner: for Mary, his interpretations of natural form were key (‘he paints an English sky & sea & yet he reveals something I should not have known but for him’—revealing far more about local sights than if he had travelled ‘far to fill a portfolio full of some stranger meteoric effects of which I had no previous idea’).⁵⁶ For George, it was more important to hunt out new truths—new ideas—where Mary proposed that there were no new truths ‘about God & man’, only new interpretations.⁵⁷ When at work on *Physical Energy*, his monumental sculpture of horse and rider, he had argued that the

aim should be to give the impression of some great truth of nature, some-thing so far too great for expression that finally it must remain indefinite. The infinite looming large behind the finite.⁵⁸

Here, George’s focus on painted trees is further explained—the real truth reached by the artist was in making tangible something extra-material; something infinite. Form was accordingly of central importance, but also only a precursor to this truth. On an 1899 trip to Dalcrombie he had set himself to paint the effects of a hill-side of a past twilight at midday. Mary questioned his methods:

“But the night you saw that afterglow there was nothing visible, it was that simplicity which made them loom up so grandly, so solemnly.” “Yes,” he said, “I know that, but it was *there*, and, however much I may mystify it later, the anatomy must be all there. To give the sense of something more that one does not see, is the key of real impressionism”.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ TGWA, Mary Watts, Diary 1887, 18 June 1887; 4 March 1887.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 1 October 1887.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 1 October 1887.

⁵⁸ Mary Watts, *George Frederick Watts, The Annals of an Artist’s Life*, 3 vols (London: Macmillan, 1912) II, pp. 235-236.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 293.

Visual impressionism was a frequent bugbear of the *fin-de-siècle* Watts; it was consequently a judgement repeated in Mary's 1912 *Annals*, despite the art world having moved on further still. Watts' truths were not necessarily visible in observed landscape, but it would be a mistake to view them solely as a product of personal engagement with landscape. They were always there, despite changing conditions, and art was 'not a presentation of nature', but the representation of the artist's sense of the infinite 'looming large' behind natural form.⁶⁰

Watts was keen that Mary would understand his reach for truth. Honeymooning in Egypt, and looking out on some sandstone ridges, he asked whether she felt that 'the one law that lies at this basis runs through all nature'.⁶¹ Mary's response was complementary: 'I feel it dimly & cannot find words for it but it is powerful all the same';

I feel that things, the smallest details of daily life, and the majestic sweep of line in the glory the rising sun, is in keeping, parts of a great design & I perceive that it makes things lie before me like a great work of art.⁶²

Mary's description demonstrates her interest in the spatial organisation of the design laid out, and her interest in the pattern by which that truth is arranged and thus interpreted. She later found an example of an ideal in

the beautiful pattern made by the shadow of a wonderful creeper, whose stems are interwoven in such a way, as to make us both wonder & admire every time we pass down stairs.⁶³

She would later confirm 'pattern making' to be her 'ideal'—speaking of one ornamental project for Limnerslease, she declared that she wished her 'patterns' to 'express the whole range, flowers, trees,

⁶⁰ TGWA, Mary Watts, Diary 1891, 7 February 1891.

⁶¹ TGWA, Mary Watts, Diary 1887, 28 January 1887.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 28 January 1887.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 5 April 1887.

birds, beasts, & man in his double nature ...'⁶⁴ In *Annals*, she described a lack of ornamentation a marked feature of George's work. The opposite must be said for her own, and yet, it provided a complementary, if differently emphasised expression of the make-up, and the interpretation of intangible truth.⁶⁵ Much like the creeper's shadow, the potentially all-encompassing symbolism of pattern could be cultivated through landscape: literally using the "interweaving greens" themselves to signify her sense of a larger design.

Consequently, Mary's approach to landscape should be read as similarly informed by her search for pattern: a search mirrored in her private writings about landscape. One July day in the Scottish Highlands, upon trying to 'photograph the loch as a mirror' (but failing, as 'a breath' quickly 'disturbed the silver face'), her description turns to frustration:

What can the little photograph keep, of that wonderful glimpse of mountain after mountain in ineffable shades of blue & green & brown [...] with the loch like glass under the shelter of the brown hills [...] Each day the colour has been different, Thursday perhaps surpassing all, because the night had been wet, & so the browns & greens were deeper, the blue more pure gentian, & the grey crags sparkling like metal.⁶⁶

Colour and tone provide essential stimulus as Mary attempts to the site. As now familiar, she has recourse to visual comparison—to the gentian (one of her favourite flowers, and frequently used to describe deep blues in landscape). These sights are necessarily fleeting; they refuse the confines of the photograph and signal to something beyond. Later, she turns to the tender green of spring ferns, the heath 'rich & brown with green brown & blue shadow', as all blend away into more 'gentian blue with green shadows'.⁶⁷ Her quick, unreflective prose registers colour as it appears to notice with no need for punctuation. One green

⁶⁴ TGWA, Mary Watts, Diary 1893, 31 January 1893; 1 February 1893.

⁶⁵ George does not appear to have held the same interest in the possibilities of decoration, at the very least within painting: on the 4th of April 1887, Mary describes his opinion that a 'decorative picture is distinct from the ideal, in so far that the ideal is something more than reality, the decorative something less [...] in its being the aim of the painter not so much to paint an ideal form, as to reduce it to a pattern'—nevertheless, he appears to have been in full support of her decorative pursuits (TGWA, Mary Watts, Diary 1887, 4 April 1887).

⁶⁶ TGWA, Mary Watts, Diary 1898, 10 July 1898.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 10 July 1898.

is not the same as the next green, or the next green-brown, or the following green shadow—all are simplified to hues recognized. Masses, shades and shadows are repeated to witness the repetitions of a quick and vibrant natural palate; to register the reiterations of colour as they impress themselves to consciousness; to emphasise the pattern of green and brown and green brown and gentian. It was not an isolated instance: a walk to the chalk pit revealed another successive burst of colours, with

the white cliff wonderful, such a grand Titian white & grey, rising above the filmy shades of tender greys & greens & reds & here & there the salmon deep yew green.⁶⁸

Mary's prose quickly registers contrasting colours and tones as they jump to notice, her rapid conjunction of one and another signalling not just the range of hues, but their competing calls for attention. It moves—combining, repeating, quickly comparing as she picks up the pace. At the end of her transcription, legibility begins to break down: objects and colours go uncontextualised to the ambiguous and yet impassioned 'salmon deep yew green'. Might 'salmon' refer to another warm hue, or reflect a metaphorical description of the deepness of the green of the yews gripping the cliff edge? It does not really matter which, for her writing—her pattern narrative—demonstrates her emphasis on interpretative pattern-making: interweaving greens above all. These interweaving greens united the aesthetic and spiritual context underpinnings her work and life, and were borne out in the Compton landscaping. As I now demonstrate, this landscaping was also used to promote the Watts' complementary artistic careers, and to insist upon their continued relevance to modern art.

The Branding of an Artist's Village: Retreat, Display, and Landscaping

Following the establishing of Limnerslease, the Watts' cultivations extended out into Compton village. Aside from the chapel, several cottages were constructed for village locals—and after the expansions, the

⁶⁸ TGWA, Mary Watts, Diary 1896, 14 October 1896.

village was described in 1908 by Surrey author Eric Parker as ‘a village presided over by a single mind’, the newer cottages adding ‘themselves to whatever is old in neighbouring buildings’.⁶⁹ Parker’s impression likely owes to their interest in Surrey architecture—as established, an interest common in the county. The initial appeal of Compton for the pair had been that slippery sense of English “charm” dictated both by a comfortable historic familiarity and its “particular variousness”—a romanticised seduction of old individuals and older buildings. Whilst Parker’s 1908 idealisation of the village owes as much to a specifically identified Old Compton as it does the new, careful, Wattsian assimilations, he indicates both the continuation of Mary’s pattern-making down into the village, and its apparent narrative success.

Just as Wattsian efforts extended into Compton, the gardens at Limmerslease were equally intended to integrate both with surrounding woodland, and to assimilate domestic life with their work. The Compton Potter’s Guild, worker’s hostelry, pottery showroom, and the Watts Gallery were developed incrementally, aided by the regular purchase of additional land from the More-Molyneux at Loseley Park. The gallery was a five-minute walk from the house ‘through our garden’, the house featuring a view down to the industry below, facilitated by a gap in the mature trees.⁷⁰ As the building projects grew, so too did the landscaping. The sweeping entrance to the gallery, marked by the first of two double archways (figure 5), was flanked by curved lawns directing the visitor to either the gallery doors or to the pottery hostelry at the second set of arches. As figure 5 indicates, large shrubs were planted on the grass, whilst Mary’s pots, created on-site, spot the central lawn, and wisteria climbs the gallery walls. Figure 6 extends the picture: flowering shrubs and small trees enclose the building approach and bound the further lawn, which itself blends to more naturalistic planting towards the boundary-line. Beyond the gallery buildings, to the

⁶⁹ Eric Parker, *Highways and Byways in Surrey* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1908) p. 59.

⁷⁰ Mary Watts, *Annals*, II, p. 305.

left of a cottage, the well-wooded knoll obscuring Limnerslease opening up to agricultural land from left to right.⁷¹

Figure 5. View from the front of the Watts Gallery, photograph (artist unknown) [redacted for copyright reasons].⁷²

To reach the gallery, a visitor would walk past the pottery, likely progressing through Mary’s hub of industry—past local workers, in demonstration of traditional crafting technique at the horse-powered pug mill (figure 7), past the pots patterning the worker’s field, past the pottery showroom, and along the garden path to G.F.’s paintings, aside which pottery was piled up, juxtaposed like Mary’s lily “gems” against the hedge. The image likely portrays a walk between public areas of the site. Figure 7 was taken roughly two decades later than the gallery images—the creepers and hedge are well established, and the

⁷¹ The cottage pictured is possibly the one inhabited by Bowler, a later gallery steward, who according to Chapman ‘spent most of his time scaring off people from walking across a piece of lawn instead of following the path’ (TWGA, Ronald Chapman and Peter Chapman, p. 65).

⁷² David Croal Thompson, ‘The New Watts Gallery at Compton’, *The Art Journal*, November 1906, p. 321; also TGWA.

pottery has a tiled roof rather than the thatch of the first structure.⁷³ Such buildings were carefully situated: the kiln (unpictured), was intended to not look out of place; ‘flower beds and grass plots’ would ‘remove any suspicion of the ordinary factory’.⁷⁴ With the exception of the Chapel, Mary appears to have planted climbers on all her buildings, enveloping all within Old Compton and her interweaving greens; edging her sites, where appropriate, with naturalistic borders of flowering shrubs and trees.

Figure 6. Watts Gallery landscaping, photograph (artist unknown) [redacted for copyright reasons].⁷⁵

⁷³ The thatched pottery burnt down in 1924. See Hilary Calvert, Louise Boreham, *Mary Seton Watts and the Compton Pottery* (London: Philip Wilson, 2019), for a commentary on the pottery’s history; also Page and Elise.

⁷⁴ Mary Watts in Calvert and Boreham, p. 23.

⁷⁵ David Croal Thompson, ‘The New Watts Gallery at Compton’, *The Art Journal*, November 1906, p. 321; also TGWA.

Figure 7. The horse-powered pug mill at the Compton Potter's Guild (post 1922) [redacted for copyright reasons].⁷⁶

Significantly, the gallery landscaping continues upwards to also enclose the hostelry built as accommodation for the pottery workers, suggesting a cohesion between both sides of the buildings, and indicating that the lives of the workers were an equally important part of the Wattsian landscape. These labourers were joined, horticulturally, to the works of a Royal Academician—raised, through planting, from “ordinary” labour. To complement this landscaped scene-setting, an early photograph of the pottery workers shows them decked out in white robes that appear modelled on the ones G. F. wore for work. It was an attempted egalitarianism mirrored by Watts’ mission for the pottery: to provide fulfilling work to the local poor, and to raise them up through art. It was a mission promoted in the press as of national importance, and explicitly linked to changing rural population dynamics. ‘A great deal has been written lately concerning the depopulation of the country and the migration of the labouring classes to London’ and unemployment, wrote Mrs. Steuart Erskine for *The English Illustrated Magazine* in 1902, viewing the Potter’s Guild as a direct solution.⁷⁷ Similarly, *Country Life* favourably reviewed the pottery as working

⁷⁶ TWGA.

⁷⁷ Mrs. Steuart Erskine, ‘Mrs G. F. Watts’ Terracotta Industry’, *The English Illustrated Magazine*, May 1902, pp. 152-158.

‘for this country of ours by trying to stay the evil which is robbing her of her strong men’: the Guild, they determined, had set ‘the potter’s wheel working within the great wheel of national life’.⁷⁸ Unlike Jekyll’s interest in the loss of the charming population and picturesque settings of Old West Surrey, Mary’s cultivations had a more explicitly philanthropic edge—nevertheless, this philanthropy was couched in those familiar narratives about old rural England. The pottery site, *Country Life* continued, took one back ‘to the long-ago days when people took life calmly, and idled their leisure time carelessly against sweet old-fashioned flowers’.⁷⁹

Beyond philanthropy, there was an undeniably entrepreneurial side to the visitor’s experience of the Watts’ garden pottery-gallery site, which demonstrated to potential customers the scope of Wattsonian industry, picturing Mary’s wares in the carefully constructed landscape. Her range could only be rendered more appealing by its proximity to Watts’ painting.⁸⁰ Such promotion can be read into Mary’s pottery-gallery landscaping, indicating an exercise in self-branding: not just as the proponent of an art for all mentality, but as a rural extension of the late nineteenth-century compulsion to blend private and studio spaces at the residences of renowned artists. As Martina Droth indicates, artists’ homes of the period were repeatedly cast as ‘visible contexts for their art’—a development ‘underscored by the complementary visuality of their work, which often mirrored the rich textures and colours of its surroundings’.⁸¹ Such domestic-artistic scenes appeared in the press, often lavishly photographed, in such publications as the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and *The Art Journal*, and in books like F. G. Stephens’ 1884 *Artists at Home*, (in which George appears, comparatively unusually for the series, sat beneath a wall of completed paintings

⁷⁸ ‘The Potter’s Wheel’, *Country Life*, 15 March 1902, pp. 328-331 (p. 330).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 330.

⁸⁰ Such proximity was capitalised on, as the pottery sold a range of decorative interior pieces intended as souvenirs, like pendants with representations of George’s work in miniature (see Calvert and Boreham).

⁸¹ Martina Droth, ‘Sculpture and Aesthetic Intent in the Late Victorian Interior’, in *Rethinking the Interior, c. 1867-1896: Aestheticism and Arts and Crafts*, ed. by Jason Edwards and Imogen Hart (London: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 211-229 (p. 213).

at his other gallery at New Little Holland House).⁸² The intention, as Droth notes, was to broadcast the idea that the artist's home was inherently creative; infused with its 'owner's personal artistic sensibilities' and set apart from other residences.⁸³

The houses of eminent artists were frequently posed communally, many, like George's London residence, located in Holland Park, London. Caroline Dakers has surveyed how Holland Park was a hotspot for Victorian art celebrities like George—those, in particular, who were well-connected with the art establishment and the Royal Academy, and who exerted a level of cultural prestige that permitted 'fashionable artists' to earn fortunes and exercise 'unparalleled influence on the artistic sensibilities and tastes of the rich'.⁸⁴ Events like 'Show Sundays' enabled visiting public to view work in artist's studios before it was sent to the Royal Academy for exhibition; a trend cultivated by Watts' own addition of a gallery to his Melbury Road property—also free to the public on Sundays.⁸⁵ The Holland Park culture relied on the support of wealthy patrons—George had first moved to the old Little Holland House in January 1851, under the patronage of Sara Prinsep. At mid-century, the Kensington residence appeared as a 'strange old-fashioned ramshackle lot of buildings in large grounds': a "farmhouse" set in a 'sweet old garden fringed with rose-bushes' melodied with 'the rural clucking of poetry and the lowing of cattle'.⁸⁶ This rustic staging provided the backdrop for Prinsep's salons, making, Dakers argues, 'bohemia acceptable' through invocations of rustic charm and pastoral play.⁸⁷ As befitting an artist who would later

⁸² Stephens enforces a grand lineage on his artists, prefacing the text by loftily claiming that 'in biographical and historical interest no pictures surpass views of the interiors of studios'. He justifies this claim by quickly sketching a line from Egyptian drawings showing the process of mummy-case decoration to 'quasi-Byzantine, Romanesque and Gothic' tempera and glass reproductions of St. Luke painting, 'scribes at work' in medieval miniatures, seventeenth-century engravings of Dutch and German studio interiors and to Hogarth and Vernet. Stephens' Artist-studio lineage neatly summarises a range of sources of great interest to Mary's own decorative work, at least up to the eighteenth century. (F. G. Stephens, *Artists at Home* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1886, preface; p. 214; p. 240; Charlotte Gere goes into more detail about the sheer range of such lifestyle journalism (Charlotte Gere, *Artist's Circles: Design and Decoration in the Aesthetic Movement* (London: V&A Publishing, 2010), p. 25)).

⁸³ Droth, p. 214.

⁸⁴ Caroline Dakers, *The Holland Park Circle: Artists and Victorian Society* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 1.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1; p. 4.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-25.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

be claimed as England's Michelangelo, George was the main attraction.⁸⁸ He stayed until it was demolished in 1871 to make way for the Melbury Road development, commissioning the building of the New Little Holland House (1876). He had moved briefly to Freshwater on the Isle of Wight in 1871, commissioning The Briary from Philip Webb next to Tennyson's Farringford—ostensibly repaying the Prinseps, but also building a more decidedly rural Artists' retreat as Holland Park was built up. Each pre-Compton residence demonstrated its own mix of cosmopolitan-meets-rural-society: locations for the artist to immerse themselves within creative (and financially supportive) communities; to pretend repose from central London; and take influence from suitably romanticised landscape and parkland. The making of Limnerslease also presented its own specific mix of such quota. It too needed to be publicly read within the Artist's Studio context to ensure George's continuing cultural prestige.

Accordingly, Mary's biographical efforts frequently centre on translating the contexts of the Artist's Studio to Limnerslease. Whilst her *Annals* were text-heavy compared to Stephens' *Artists at Home*, the chosen illustrations narrate the translation. In a change from the brooding interiors Stephens pictures, Mary presents George mostly outdoors. Old Little Holland House is represented in two images from Vol I, both prints made after drawings by Frederick L. Griggs, and both showing views up to the house through the grounds, peeping picturesquely through clumps of mature trees. Volume II aims to draw continuity between these residences, blending the grounds of Limnerslease and New Little Holland House together by posing the great artist in the garden. First, Watts appears seated behind some white Annunciation lilies, behind which are creeper-clad house, mature treeline, and the work-in-progress *Physical Energy* (figure 8). Mary's text provided further interpretation: 'unfailingly after breakfast the great horse and its rider rolled out from the sculpture studio into the garden'—'the figure in the white smock worked on tirelessly'.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ One Who Knew Him, 'George Frederick Watts, R.A., O.M.', *The English Illustrated Magazine*, August 1904, pp. 520-522 (p. 520).

⁸⁹ Mary Watts, *Annals*, II, p. 85.

Figure 8. 'In the Garden, Little Holland House, Melbury Road' reproduced from Emery Walker [redacted for copyright reasons].⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Mary Watts, *Annals of an Artist's Life, Volume II*, p. 85.

Figure 9. 'In the Barn Garden, Limnerslease', reproduced from Emery Walker [redacted for copyright reasons].⁹¹

The garden, Mary argues, was especially suited for G. F.'s Renaissance aspirations: the greenhouses allowed layers of paint to 'be baked' as he thought 'the climate of Italy' permitted a like purity of colour to 'men who were certain to seize upon it'.⁹² Next comes more photographs—'The Garden doorway Limnerslease', picturing a close-up of open door, rose covered brick façade and rosemary edged steps; 'Limnerslease from the South Side', looking to the house and terracotta pots of bays; G. F. is posed in the doorway of 'A Limnerslease workshop'; seated 'In the Barn Garden Limnerslease' on one of Mary's sundial-bench hybrids (figure 9); and 'At work upon the Statue of Lord Tennyson' in the Barn Garden across the road from Limnerslease.⁹³ To emphasise Watts landscapes as within artistic tradition, carefully posed photographs (offering more apparently documentary content)

⁹¹ Mary Watts, *Annals of an Artist's Life, Volume II*, p. 285.

⁹² "I like them to be baked," he used to say; and for this purpose the canvases stood about for days, or even weeks, in a glasshouse in the garden' (Ibid., p. 89).

⁹³ Of the remaining illustrations, one shows Watts at work, one is a photograph of him indoors at Limnerslease, one is a print of an unfinished work, and the final illustration is from a watercolour of his studio interior at the New Little Holland House (after J. M. Rooke, 1904).

were balanced in comparison with watercolours or engravings, with Griggs' engravings making ideal contributions to Mary's attempt to secure George's reputation. Griggs was a key figure of the Art Worker's Guild; an acclaimed etcher and architectural draughtsman in search of the memorialisation of England; although after the Great War he moved away from flattering depictions of Victorian Artist's Houses to a different source of national pride: a pastorally envisaged old England made up from 'medieval farms, tithe barns and parish churches' he saw threatened by modern life and war horror.⁹⁴ However, whilst Grigg's aesthetic relevance would endure well into the twentieth-century (he would prove an essential influence to interwar artists also in search of rural England, like John Piper and Graham Sutherland), his engravings were not enough to temper Watts' posthumous reception as increasingly outdated.⁹⁵

The Watts landscapes were also promoted in relevant periodicals. In November 1906, art critic David Croal Thompson reviewed 'The New Watts Gallery at Compton' for *The Art Journal*—claiming the late Watts' nearly fifteen-year residence in the village as transforming it to an 'object of pilgrimage'.⁹⁶ The article was illustrated with photographs of the gallery layout and landscaping (as seen in figures 5 and 6). It was by no means the first time photographs of Limmerslease were circulated within relevant periodicals: an *Illustrated London News* article from 1893 had gloried in the 'cool green foliage' of the 'picturesque garden' filled 'with old favourites from flowerland', judged as an eminently appropriate rural retreat for the Great Victorian artist; and was followed by various additional publicisations of the great artist within abundant gardens.⁹⁷ In 1902, *The Illustrated London Magazine* photographed one of Mary's sundials, two profligate cottage borders, and a view over the agricultural land beyond.⁹⁸ The article found

⁹⁴ Anne Anderson, Robert Meyrick, Peter Nahum, *Ancient Landscapes, Pastoral Visions: Samuel Palmer to the Ruralists* (Woodbridge: ACC Editions, 2008), p. 29.

⁹⁵ See Jerrold Northrop Moore, *F. L. Griggs: The Architecture of Dreams* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999).

⁹⁶ David Croal Thompson, 'The New Watts Gallery at Compton', *The Art Journal*, November 1906, p. 321.

⁹⁷ D. W. 'The Surrey Home of Mr. G. F. Watts, R.A.', *The Illustrated London News*, 29 July 1893, p. 135.

⁹⁸ Mrs. Steuart Erskine, 'Mrs G. F. Watts' Terracotta Industry', *The English Illustrated Magazine*, May 1902, pp. 152-158.

a full cottage industry interwoven with Surrey landscape: ‘we cross a little wood and visit a group of potter’s studios in which we find the potter’s wheel in all its primeval simplicity’—and all was again tied together through the invocation of George in the garden.⁹⁹ George sits atop one of Mary’s creations within the Barn Garden, and the article concludes by noting that ‘it is a pleasant picture to carry away into everyday life, and one which takes us back into the Middle Ages—the picture of the Guild of Artist Craftsmen grouped around the great painter’.¹⁰⁰

Such public placings did not cease with George’s death: February 1913 saw the Limnerslease gardens appear in *The Country Home*, photographing more floral schemes, and a walk near Limnerslease spotted with Mary’s terracotta.¹⁰¹ Compton scenes were circulated on postcodes from 1902 by Friths of Ryegate and Alfred Challen in Compton: publicising images of the village, Limnerslease, the gallery, pottery and chapel amongst their collection. And paintings had also been made after photographs of the grounds: two oils by Louis Deuchars, one of Mary’s permanent pottery workers and George’s sculptural assistant. There was the 1897 *G. F. Watts in the Garden Arbour at Limnerslease*—an oil rendition of G. F. seated quietly on the arbour adjoining the house; and a 1904 now-lost oil representation of George seated in the Barn garden, based on a private photograph also publicised in the press, and later circulated in *Annals*.¹⁰² Deuchar’s surviving oil demonstrates a key aestheticisation of Wattsonian landscape. It is a scene laced with greenery and yet shouting homage to G. F.’s Renaissance-isms—seated below the imitation Luce della Robbia roundel (now lost); amidst vine leaves, nasturtiums, and orange and olive trees in terracotta pots for further gestures to the Mediterranean. The original photograph does not display most of Deuchars’ flora: only a less-virulent creeper climbs the left-hand wall.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

¹⁰¹ Wilfrid M. Webb, ‘George Frederic Watts and Limnerslease’, *The Country Home*, February 1913, p. 215.

¹⁰² See, for example, Erskine, p. 158; Deuchar’s 1897 oil resides in the National Portrait Gallery’s collection.

¹⁰³ But it does not, as Deuchars’ does, cloak the top of the photographic scene.

Unlike Watts' photo in *Artists at Home*, the emphases of these landscaped pictures indicate a gardened artistic domesticity. Each space is carefully composed—be it the studio-garden setting of the new Holland House, or the Down Farm rose garden—the farmyard-come-sculpture-yard-come-cottage garden. And in another twist, such promoted picturings featured Mary's creations—a terracotta bench; a sundial at the centre of the Down Farm garden; pots to spot the lawns. A faint Celtic scroll can just be made out under Deuchars' olive tree, neatly integrating Compton Pottery further into the domestic garden space of the Great Artist. It was another tactic common to the Victorian great artist: as Droth argues, frequently common to the presentation of the Artist at Home was the formation of a domestically focused sculptural aesthetic, developing sculptural artefact intended for the home, but transformed in the vicinity of the Great Artist, to be 'not merely regarded as domestic accessory' but high art, in the ideally cultivated environment.¹⁰⁴ Mary is generally absent from these pictures, and as I later discuss, the positioning of the pottery's work within the Home Arts and Industries Association complicated its reception. The inclusion of her work nevertheless legitimises it through its close proximity to George, whilst continuing to demonstrate Mary's project of closely weaving together a material legacy in Compton, placing the motifs of the Victorian House-Studio within the country garden.

The Watts were not alone in their rural movements: as discussed, Surrey was a popular destination for upper-middle-class artists and craftspeople. However, whilst Mary translates the house-studio to the more explicitly rural house-studio-garden, Compton self-placing should also be read in the context of the Artist's rural retreat. From mid-century, the latter was progressively styled as a creative refuge from cosmopolitan life in a stimulus-filled landscape—a landscape simultaneously aestheticised through its proximity to the Greats, and their consequent representations of it. Various of Watts' closest artistic acquaintances (and those familiar to Holland Park) were taken by such impulses to, including Burne-Jones at the Georgian Prospect House, in Rottingdean, Sussex, and the aforementioned Tennyson

¹⁰⁴ Droth, p. 225.

in Freshwater.¹⁰⁵ Whilst, as Charlotte Boyce et al. note, the sixties and seventies Freshwater has been critically portrayed as ‘Little Holland House-by-sea’, there were crucial differences between the traditions of the retreat and the studio-house.¹⁰⁶ The Holland Park life provided ‘self-consciously fashionable events at which to see and be seen’ and a deliberate blurring of public and private spaces.¹⁰⁷ Alternatively, communities assembling at Freshwater were intended to be private, revelling in their rural location and its apparent separation from London and the demands of artistic celebrity (despite the fact that, as with Freshwater, colonies of notable artists had a tendency to form quickly).¹⁰⁸ The Great would tinker with their surroundings to impose an aesthetic lineage on the land.

Renovations of historic properties were rife in the period amongst the Victorian artistic elite, with William Morris’ sixteenth-century Kelmscott Manor in Oxfordshire, planted with medieval-inspired trellises of raspberry canes, frequently hailed as an early example of the high-design Arts and Crafts garden.¹⁰⁹ Then there was Batemans, Kipling’s seventeenth-century Sussex residence. Both properties were renovated by Webb—a key name not just for his connection with SPAB, but for his connection with the artists of the Holland Park circle, including George.¹¹⁰ Each property was also linked to agricultural community, likely contributing to their modern aestheticisations. Bateman’s, for instance, had begun life as a Jacobean mansion, before falling into disrepair and being used as a farmhouse; Kelmscott had been built by a local farmer before being converted to a manor in 1870. Being taken up in part for their access to a labouring English heritage, both were another part of the cultural appropriation of the rural vernacular by artistic cultures—one which augmented the growing desire to acquire and transform such property.

¹⁰⁵ Jones’ Georgian Prospect House provided from 1881 the site for family home, recovery from ill-health, studio and church (complete with a Burne-Jones window); across the village green, the first country settling-place for Burne-Jones’ nephew Rudyard Kipling at Grange House (the gardens of which would receive a Lutyens and Jekyll makeover after his death).

¹⁰⁶ Charlotte Boyce, Páraic Finnerty, Anne-Marie Millim, *Victorian Celebrity Culture and Tennyson’s Circle* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 5.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁰⁹ See Sarah Rutherford, *The Arts and Crafts Garden* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

¹¹⁰ Dakers (1999) provides an interesting survey of Webb’s connection with the properties of the Holland Park elite.

Whilst Limnerslease and the pottery and gallery sites were newly built (albeit in deference to vernacular architecture), Mary also engaged in her own conversion of historic farmyard to garden at Down Farm. She chose, like Kipling, Morris, and Jekyll, a play on the cottage garden: mixes of tall and bright flowering shrubs within overgrown, yet enclosed spaces or courtyards. Such transformations are intriguing—expressing another modern desire to memorialise “humble” cottage communities; to reclaim lived heritages in which figures from different classes have lived and worked; to raise the status of country-work through a nod to cottage aesthetics. However, the historic farm to garden trajectory most fascinates because it does not return a plot to agricultural practice, but rather aestheticises its history through planting—aestheticises the separation between the building’s origins and its current incarnation. In doing so, Mary’s Barn Garden can be read as making another crucial link to establish her and George’s shared partnership within Compton landscapes. The Barn Farm garden site was not just another example of the late Victorian interest in tastefully renovating historic property with links to agricultural community, but, as a garden-meets-sculpture yard, was also the site for the Great Artist to do his work; and in particular, for Watts to work on his grand memorial sculpture of another Great—Tennyson. The Barn Garden, posed as a site to bring together essential cultural threads, offers an intriguing example of the possibilities of the country garden as site for self-placing and self-promotion.

Tennyson was one of Watts’ foundational influences, and so Freshwater was the rural retreat likely most influential to the Mary’s conceptualisations of an appropriate artists working retreat. It possessed various similarities to West Surrey: being, until the twentieth century, a predominately agricultural area living to an agrarian calendar; but also flanked with impressive geological stimuli—bordered on the South by its own long chalk ridge, with cliffs to the western edge running to the Needles. Tennyson’s Farringford House (his home from 1853-1892) was at the Western tip; nearby at Dimbola lived photographer Margaret Cameron; and aside from his time at the Briary, Watts made frequent visits. Tennyson and Watts’ shared cultural capital as figureheads of Victorian art celebrity was so linked that an early Limnerslease press report referred back to Tennyson and Farringford to characterise Mary’s

picturesquely posed gardens. ‘Wandering over the hills of Surrey’ to Limnerslease, the author described, ‘your thoughts turn directly’ to Tennyson’s *Freshwater*; “‘close to the ridge of a noble down’”, they quote, ‘where, far from noise and smoke of town, he enjoys his careless-ordered garden’.¹¹¹ Mary’s garden attempt to maintain George’s reputation was working, at least for a time, publicly sketching a narrative between the gardens of the artistic elite. It was not such a leap to make: after all, Tennyson’s textual gardens were also headily aestheticised spaces—gardens transformed to sensual, tempting, ever-blooming plots, informed by the temperate climate of the Isle of Wight—and gardens imbued with love and loss, like the 1865 ‘Maud’, where the reader, along with the eponymous figure, is repeatedly instructed to

Come into the garden, Maud,
I am here at the gate alone;
And the woodbine spices are wafted abroad,
And the musk of the rose is blown.¹¹²

Maud, and her garden, are characterised as one by unfulfilled promise: her idyllic separation from Tennyson’s progressively crazed and frustrated speaker, who must by necessity only watch over the garden gate; her depiction as one with the personified light and beauty of the lilies and roses. A Tennysonian sensuality of the garden is taken up in Mary’s expectation of bright lilies and roses at Limnerslease—perhaps too in her anticipation of the loss of George. Unfortunately, Mary’s attempted cultivation of George’s aesthetic relevance was not to hold within the artistic cultures of the twentieth-century.

First drafted in 1923, Woolf’s *Freshwater* resolutely mocks the previous century’s artist’s retreat, centring on George and Tennyson as emblematic of a high-Victorian denial of the factual for the symbolic. In the 1935 version of the play, performed at a Bloomsbury party (with Duncan Grant as

¹¹¹ D. W., ‘The Surrey Home of Mr. G. F. Watts, R. A.’, p. 135.

¹¹² Alfred Lord Tennyson, ‘Maud’, in *The Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson* (London: Wordsworth Editions, 1994), pp. 382-419 (p. 406).

George), Watts' motto 'The Utmost for the Highest' is repeated to farcical levels and Tennyson repeatedly quotes from 'Maud', reducing Ellen Terry (Watts' first wife) to 'Queen Rose of the rosebud garden of girls'.¹¹³ The Greats' affectations continue to absurd results as objects, animals, persons, and facts are supplanted for art, and treated with an obtuse indifference. A turkey is spontaneously sacrificed so that its wings may convert Ellen to photographer Cameron's muse ('the turkey is happy, Ellen, the turkey has become part and parcel of my immortal art'); Mr. Cameron fusses over the existence of trousers; and Ellen laments that 'sometimes I'm modesty. Sometimes I'm poetry ... sometimes, generally before breakfast, I'm merely Nell'.¹¹⁴

This is not the place to discuss Woolf's interpretations of Victorian high art.¹¹⁵ However, Woolf visited Limnerslease in her youth, and Cameron was her aunt. As Veronica Gould recounts, it had been the eighteen-year-old Mary who had walked hand-in-hand with Tennyson along moonlit Freshwater shores quoting 'Maud'; and it was Mary and her sisters immortalised in Cameron's photographic ode to the poem *Rosebud Garden of Girls* (1868).¹¹⁶ Despite these details, Woolf's satire is pushed back to Ellen Terry—possibly to join her judgment of the absurdity of Freshwater artistry with that of Terry's marriage to Watts. Freshwater, after-all, provided an easily mockable concentration of high Victorianism; however, whilst George was a familiar target for Woolf, and whilst Wattsonian Compton activities were heavily influenced by Victorian artistic traditions, Mary's efforts were perhaps less easily categorised. She made persistent attempts to maintain a nineteenth-century legacy well into the twentieth, whilst also cultivating a village industry intending to make modern shapes. Accordingly, her Artist's village should also be read

¹¹³ Their marriage was spectacularly short-lived. The thirty-six-year-old George had apparently wanted to rescue the sixteen-year-old Ellen from the stage; he was demonstrably unsuccessful, and ironically, Woolf presents Ellen's actual "rescue" from Watts through theatre (Freshwater., p. 17; p. 40).

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 14; p. 24.

¹¹⁵ Woolf's memoirs, as Elizabeth Hirsch notes, frequently link the presence of Watts' portraits to a sense of lingering Victorianism (Elizabeth Hirsch, 'Virginia Woolf and Portraiture', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and the Arts*, ed. by Maggie Humm (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp. 160-178 (p. 162).

¹¹⁶ Gould, p. 23.

amongst other twentieth-century rural artist's communities centred on the decorative arts—like the later cluster surrounding Bell and Grant's Charleston (with Woolf nearby); the works made and sold by Dora Carrington; and, as I shortly discuss, Eric Gill's Ditchling community in Sussex

More than Garden Ornament: Production and Persistence

The building of the chapel, the setting up of the community pottery, and the building of the new Watts gallery were overlapping projects. The chapel was begun in 1895, after Mary's plans were made structurally workable by architect George Redmayne, was mostly constructed in 1896, with the exterior decoration finished in 1898 after continued work by four permanent workers and village locals (from 1896) executing Mary's designs for the exterior ornament.¹¹⁷ The chapel interior was completed in 1904. The local classes for chapel decoration grew into the pottery; from here, with the acquisition of pottery sheds and kiln in 1898 (and early designs for Mary's first terracotta tombstone and the excitement of a 'kiln packed'); and consultation with master-potter William de Morgan.¹¹⁸ The pottery became the Compton Potter's Guild in 1906, producing an increasing range of designs.

As noted, the pottery first predominantly made terracotta garden ornament. The pots were intended to survive English frosts (something Mediterranean imports often failed to manage) and were the simplest of Mary's garden-ware designs. There were a range of styles on offer: first up, the nods to Italian design with 'Apple Pot', 'Duchess Pot', the succinctly named 'Square Italian' and 'Oblong Italian' boxes decorated with horizontal garlands of flora and fruit.¹¹⁹ There were the 'Tudor' designs for pot, flower box and sundial, each ornamented with Mary's take on the Tudor rose; the 'Greek' pots for Hellenistic

¹¹⁷ The permanent workers were George Andrews, Thomas Steadman, Frank Mitchell and Louis Deuchars.

¹¹⁸ TWGA, Diary 1898, 7 May 1898.

¹¹⁹ *The Potter's Art Guide, Compton, Guildford: Price List of Pots and Sundials*. Potter's Art Guide, 1915, p. 15; p. 19.

tastes; and Mary's preferred—the 'Celtic' knots of pots including 'Scroll' and 'Cobra'.¹²⁰ As shortly discussed, the latter designs adorned myriad objects, and featured most prominently in promotion of her work. Nevertheless, the stylistic conjunction of Compton wares demonstrate Mary's awareness of the types of ornamental historicism popular in the twentieth-century garden—the classical and Italianate matched with English Tudor and Mary's own translation of indigeneity, the Celtic. By working with terracotta she was developing on a modern tradition of its use in late-nineteenth-century decoration—as Michael Stratton notes, the 'innovative' use of terracotta can be especially read from the beginning of the Art Worker's Guild in 1884, in particular in the architectural decorations of Charles Harrison Townsend, Edward Prior, Halsey Ricardo and Gilbert Bayes.¹²¹ The progenitors for Mary's Italianate designs can be assumed to be the antiques so luxuriously presented by Jekyll in the 1918 *Garden Ornament*—whilst Mary's pots are not copies, they clearly reference the curving wreaths of flowers and fruit Jekyll reproduces, with a selective use of decorative horizontal bands; they are, however, more simply registered, generally possessing a plain base, with the greatest concentration of decoration on the top-half of the pot edge. They consequently made modern (and affordable) references to the Great Country House gardens of England and their genuine bowls and basins from antiquity.

Despite their friendship, Jekyll does not appear to have immediately supported Mary's wares. In a 1908 *Country Life* article, she promoted the designs of Julia Chance, another maker of garden ornament at the nearby Lutyens-built (and Jekyll-gardened) Orchards. As was typical to Jekyll's decorative studies, she began by tracing "good" ornamental expression to the Italian Renaissance, continuing to lament a modern loss of spirit and nobility in modern craftsmanship. Chance's objects (mostly animals reproduced in lead and bronze) provided one example of notable work in 'this new-old field': they were 'fine art', emphasising interpretation over formal imitation.¹²² Jekyll did not promote Compton pottery in *Country*

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 19.

¹²¹ Michael Stratton, *The Terracotta Revival: Building Innovation and the Image of the Industrial City in Britain and North America* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1993), p. 104

¹²² Gertrude Jekyll, 'Garden Sculpture', *Country Life*, 11 Jan 1908, pp. 47-49 (p. 48).

Life, despite Mary's aim to 'give better shapes than the modern Italian'.¹²³ Early coverage in the magazine did refer to Mary's work as dealing more than satisfactorily 'with this question of the decorative garden pot', also posing the products in rustic garden scenes to tempt possible sales.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, Mary had doubts over Jekyll's early support—in April 1902, she frustratedly wrote that 'the editor of *Country Life*' had called intending on ordering pots, but had been dissuaded during a stop-off at Munstead Wood. 'Possibly Miss Jekyll has an Italian protégé, to whom we are rivals', Mary writes—a not unreasonable assumption, considering Jekyll's fondness for antique Neapolitan pots.¹²⁵ Any rivalry was eventually smoothed over: one of Mary's later Italianate designs was named 'The Jekyll' in what was likely another branding exercise. Jekyll bought some pots for Munstead Wood and wrote briefly of the pottery in *Gardens for Small Country Houses*. Finally, Compton pots were commissioned in miniature for the Jekyll garden adjoining Queen Mary's Lutyens designed Doll's House (constructed 1921-1924) for which Jekyll had designed a garden. It was a marker of the cultural success of the Compton Potter's Guild: Rachel Duffett details how, when exhibited between April and November 1924, the project was viewed by 1,617,556 people, in what Duffett calls a miniaturised 'paradigm of "Englishness"' through 'the reassertion of domestic and private worlds' nearly lost to the War.¹²⁶

Jekyll's early lack of promotion likely simply reflects that she was not as interested in the Watts' mission before the objects themselves gained cultural capital. She was, after-all, most interested in the picturesquely posed poor—but it is also possible that she did not initially consider Compton wares as

¹²³ TWGA, Mary Watts, Letter from Mary Watts to James Nicol, 17 December 1900.

¹²⁴ Mary did receive some coverage in *Country Life*—in the March of 1902, her contribution to the successful English adoption of the Italian tradition of moulding 'brick-earths into forms of art as full of life and individuality as those chiselled in marble' is analysed as dealing 'satisfactorily with this question of the decorative garden pot ('The Potter's Wheel', *Country Life*, 15 March 1902, pp. 328-331 (p. 328).

¹²⁵ TWGA, Mary Watts, Diary 1902, 29 March 1902.

¹²⁶ Rachel Duffett, 'The War in Miniature: Queen Mary's Dolls' House and the Legacies of the First World War', *Culture and Social History*, 16 (2019), 431-449 (p. 431); Jiye Ryu expands on the sheer scale of the project: involved were '250 craftsmen and manufacturers, 60 artist-decorators, 700 artists, 600 writers, and 500 donors' (Jiye Ryu, 'The Queen's Dolls' House within the British Empire Exhibition: Encapsulating the British Imperial World', *Contemporary British History*, 33 (2019) 462-482 (p. 466).

worthy of the reach towards “high art”.¹²⁷ Much of Mary’s intent with Compton Pottery was visibly devoted to the Home Arts, and as such, directed towards the possibility of providing fulfilling work to rural individuals. In 1900, she praised the work of an unnamed contemporary so successful that she was ‘paying over £1400 in wages’; and would later note her similar goal to provide comparable wages whilst also affording ‘scope for the development of the talent of the student’.¹²⁸ Consequently, despite her decorative talents, Mary often suppressed her visibility as head designer to promote the pottery as a communal enterprise: referring to herself as merely ‘a worker’ of the Compton Potter’s Art Guild.¹²⁹ Hilary Underwood has argued that the pottery’s Guild emphasis suggested a pre-individualistic age where the creative worker was ‘happy to remain anonymous’ (a view certainly corroborated by early press publicity), noting how chapel contributors were only permitted to sign their names on the reverse of decorative tiles—furthermore, when workers were publicly named, it was generally in the context of a list of their fellows.¹³⁰ Nevertheless, even in later years, Mary held creative control. The Guild’s 1920 formal constitution ensured that as director, she could veto any design.¹³¹ It is likely that whilst signalling to pre-industrial guild settings, such leadership deferrals were partly another branding exercise, just like her landscaped assimilations into a vaguer “Wattsian” landscape that remained her design.

The initial success of Mary’s Celtic-style pots led to her range being taken up by Liberty’s, who staged a small exhibition of ‘Modern Celtic Art’ in March 1903. Accompanying the exhibition was the *Book of Garden Ornaments*, the preface of which stating that ‘the present exhibitors have struck out into untrodden paths... largely aided and advised by Mrs. G. F. Watts’.¹³² Liberty’s *Book* introduced the

¹²⁷ In addition, it is entirely possible that Jekyll’s description of Chance’s work was precipitated in part by the fact that Chance had commissioned Lutyens and Jekyll for house and garden at Orchards.

¹²⁸ TWGA, *A Village Pottery—A Developed Industry*, p. 101.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

¹³⁰ Hilary Underwood, ‘Mary Watts, the Home Arts and Industries Association and Compton’, in *An Artist’s Village: G. F. Watts and Mary Watts at Compton*, ed. Mark Bills (London: Philip Wilson, 2011), pp. 47-66 (p. 59); see Erskine.

¹³¹ Calvert and Boreham, p. 72.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 42.

history of Compton pottery as an Arts and Crafts branding exercise, narrating how the work arose from Mary's classes, growing into an industry concerned with developing 'artist-craftsmen' through the cultivation of clay 'dug on the spot'.¹³³ The modernity of the designs was broadcast through bold and capitalised sans-serif headings, loudly reiterating 'Garden Pots and Sundials' on every page.¹³⁴ These ornaments were awarded gold and silver medals by the Royal Botanic Society and the RHS; and in 1906 promoted again in the 1906 *Studio Year Book of Decorative Art*.¹³⁵ Mary's role at the Potter's Guild was partly addressed in Liberty's *Book*, albeit again in an advisory capacity—yet Liberty's approach to such wares, generally retitling and presenting designers anonymously, has contributed to the cultural misidentification of Mary's work.¹³⁶ The chapel was frequently attributed to George (who had little to do with it beyond providing financial backing), and the door design to Redmayne.¹³⁷ Such was the scale of misidentification that Ronald Chapman, the son of Mary's ward, recorded an apparently popular clerihow in his unpublished writing on Limnerslease:

The finances of Constable
Were unstable
But Watts
Made pots.¹³⁸

It would be unwise to expect to glean much from the whimsy of a clerihow—nevertheless, the rhyme makes the pottery George's enterprise, simplifies the designs to "pots", and the motivation to the financial stability of the assumed head artist.¹³⁹ Mary's approach to biography was self-effacing to the extreme—continuing to pose George as the figurehead for her artist's village despite evidence to the contrary.

¹³³ TWGA, Liberty & Co, *Book of Garden Ornaments*, 1903, p. 4.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4; p.5

¹³⁵ Barbara Morris, 'Liberty's Pioneer Designer', in *Mary Watts: Unsung Heroine of the Art Nouveau*, ed. by Veronica Gould (Guildford: Watts Gallery, 1998), pp. 11-14 (p. 12).

¹³⁶ Some Compton Pottery work was understood as that of Archibald Knox until the 1970s. Barbara Morris also notes that Mary's 'Celtic-style' design for the first of James Morton's like carpets at Liberty's (see Morris).

¹³⁷ See Parker's *Highways and Byways of Surrey*.

¹³⁸ Chapman and Chapman, p. 65.

¹³⁹ especially considering that at least at first, George was to bankroll the operation rather than benefit from it.

However, whilst she may have worked to secure his legacy for the twentieth century, by posing George as figurehead, she could also cultivate a place for her own designs, adjoining his cultural prestige.

Such deferrals differentiate Mary's activities from contemporaneous rural artistic communities. In Ditchling, Eric Gill generated a twentieth-century artist's community set around Gill and his ideas—ideas which, like Mary's, were heavily informed by his personal interpretations of Christian faith; were conceived as essentially influenced by rural life; and were also manifested in sculptural artefact. Both were interested in raising communal, spiritual sites: in addition to his own artist's village at Ditchling, to Mary's chapel Gill raised his distinctly spiritual (if more blasphemous) uncompleted plans at Asheham house near Lewes for a twentieth-century Stonehenge—a temple, and site for 'a series of immense human figures standing like gods and giants in the Sussex landscape'.¹⁴⁰ There were many differences between the two "villages": Mary's landscapes were far less sexually explicit (indeed, David Jones' 1921 portrayal of Ditchling life in *The Garden Enclosed* now seems to provide an incestuous counterpart to Mary's comparably chaste diversions to the *Hortus Conclusus*).¹⁴¹ Despite his figurehead status, Gill was also more interested in a mimicry of peasant life than the landscaped comfort of the Victorian artist at home, and his sculptor's farmyard was less rose garden, more 'peculiar and alarming'; described by one pilgrim with 'big blocks of unhewn stone', 'a large stone crucifix and an austere looking Madonna'.¹⁴² Whilst Watts made pots for a commercial market, the 'primitive candour' of Gill's sculpture was touted by Roger Fry as Post-Impressionist; was commissioned for the Durbins gardens; and his *The Golden Calf* was presented in the Octagon Room at The Grafton's 1913 second Post-impressionist exhibition, amongst Cézanne, Derain and Picasso.

¹⁴⁰ Fiona MacCarthy, *Eric Gill* (London: Faber, 2011), p. 160.

¹⁴¹ Gill initiated (and wrote about) various sexual, adulterous (and in at least some cases necessarily abusive and incestuous) relations with prostitutes, his sister, daughter, dog, and others, leading the significations of Jones' domestic references to *The Song of Songs* in *The Garden Enclosed* to feel evermore uncomfortable: see MacCarthy.

¹⁴² Peter Anson in MacCarthy, p. 194.

Of course, much of Mary and Gill's works differed greatly—comparing Celtic and Italianate terracotta gardenware to Gill's more severe religious figurations may seem a little like comparing apples and oranges. Whilst Gill's fame was on the up, George's reputation was suffering, and likely affecting perceptions of Mary's work, which was ornamental, domestic, and practically inclined: and its association with the Home Arts would have impacted its reception. As Underwood notes, despite running parallel from the comparable prestige of the Arts and Crafts movement (also the allegiance of a pre-Ditchling Gill), the impact of the Home Arts and Industries Association (HAIA) was 'limited because of its primary focus on 'cultural philanthropy'.¹⁴³ In addition, whilst the HAIA was originally intended to display Arts and Crafts alongside Home Arts 'without differentiation or hierarchy', contributing to a supposed democratisation of interior design, Bridget Elliott and Janice Helland demonstrate rising perceptions of "mere" ornament as artistically defunct, noting that women and "amateur" craftspeople 'remained marginalised'.¹⁴⁴ Despite the notoriety of the Artist's Residence, and the possible legitimacy offered to domestic sculptural projects, the ornamental was becoming progressively associated with a feminine domestic, and against the apparent demands of high modernism, regardless of any shared recourse to "primitive" iconography. Whilst Compton pots maintained enough cultural capital to be miniaturised in the Dolls House (possibly due to their branded link to Jekyll) they were no longer at the forefront of decorative work.

Nevertheless, there remain intriguing comparisons between the works of Mary and Gill. One large terracotta model of a mother and child survives at the Compton site: a simply rendered, intimate, and almost quietly composed form. On the other hand, Gill's strongly characterised and often sexualized forms more overtly emphasise touch and connection—a mother wrapped around, entwined even, with her

¹⁴³ Underwood, p. 47.

¹⁴⁴ Janice Helland, "'Good Work and Clever Design': Early Exhibitions of the Home Arts and Industries Association', *The Journal of Modern Craft*, 5 (2012), 275-293 (p. 279); Bridget Elliott and Janice Helland, 'Introduction', in *Women Artists and the Decorative Arts 1880-1935: The Gender of Ornament*, ed. by Elliott and Helland (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), pp. 1-15 (p. 6).

child; or the Virgin, nude and outstretched (as with *Garden Statue – The Virgin* (1911-12), the work destined for Fry’s garden at Durbins, replacing *Mulier* (1911), which Fry had rejected for its provocative nature.¹⁴⁵ The pair also both produced memorial sculpture, including tombstones, and where Mary’s terracotta designs demonstrate more modern Celtic (a rare style before 1890), Gill’s maintain his own smooth, sweeping, intimate style; two distinct interpretations of each’s study of primitive iconography. Mary’s interest in Celtic motif was both autobiographically led, as well as a part of a wider cultural interest in prehistoric decoration. As I shortly discuss, for nineteenth-century historians relied upon by Mary, Celtic art was considered a vernacular expression of pattern pre-dating early Christianity. Its incorporation into early Christian art was rationalised as due to its importance to local community: newly Christianised, the “primitive Celtic” was endowed with Biblical significance. On the other hand, Gill aimed at an unornamental simplicity—his 1915 stone carvings for the unadorned Westminster Cathedral were intended as ‘furniture, not decorations’ in ‘a diagrammatic treatment of the subjects’—a ‘plain language’ of understandable symbol.¹⁴⁶ Judith Collins indicates that whilst his “simple” style promoted his description as ‘Neo-Byzantine, Assyrian and Primitive’ (all historical styles also of interest to Mary), Gill maintained that his style was not imitative but a necessity for the expression of his ideas.¹⁴⁷ Detail needed to be symbolic, and above all, translatable. However, for Mary, ornamental detail needed to bring attention to pattern itself, signalling to those interweaving combinations. In lieu of simplicity, Mary favoured all-encompassing iconographical combinations, and this patterning made its way from the landscape, where it had been first interpreted, to her gardenware.

Her attention to pattern was fully realised at the Compton mortuary chapel: an intricate, terracotta-faced translation of her interweaving greens into ornament. The (landscaped) graveyard was

¹⁴⁵ *Mulier* was later described by Hope Wolf as ‘a nipple-pinching Blessed Virgin Mary’ Hope Wolf, *Sussex Modernism: Retreat and Rebellion, an Exhibition Catalogue* (London: Two Temple Place, 2017), p. 14.

¹⁴⁶ Judith Collins, ‘Eric Gill’s Stations of the Cross in Westminster Cathedral’, *The Journal of the Decorative Arts Society 1890-1940*, 6 (1982), 23-30 (p. 24).

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

open for burials in 1896, and an Italianate red-brick cloister planned to the far-left of the chapel in 1906, and inaugurated in 1911. The cloister formed a memorial to George, to those lost later in the Wars, and to those important to Wattsian Compton activities. Next to the cloister, Mary's chapel was 'cruciform, and at the same time circular', resembling 'the centre of a Celtic High Cross'—and her prehistoric tendencies did not stop there.¹⁴⁸ Her decorative interpretations of Scripture were laced with winding vines and 'interlacing' Celtic 'cord'.¹⁴⁹ It is a curious building—to the unfamiliar, sometimes confusing, its symbolic profusion rendering it at least partially illegible without prior guidance. Mary was conscious of the complication of her design, publishing her interpretation within *The Word in the Pattern* (1905): a guide to interpreting her decoration.¹⁵⁰

The chapel sat atop Budborough hill, along a meandering path flanked by yews, with Mary's habitual climber covering replaced with curling terracotta. Her interest in memorial gardening was brought to the fore: roses were planted along the cloister wall facing George's grave as under his bedroom window, Mary musing 'I may have my Cloister ready'—'I want our Compton to be an example of what's God's acre may be'.¹⁵¹ The grave was set horizontally, topped with a 'bird's drinking bowl'.¹⁵² She had long considered burial ground composition, positing that 'if people will put memorial tablets in the cloister instead of erecting tall upright stones above the graves, the cemetery will be more like a garden'.¹⁵³ Her reasoning was that a profusion of tall stones, whilst 'very beautiful in themselves', compete in juxtaposition, where recumbent monuments possessed a 'much more restful effect'.¹⁵⁴ Historic recumbent memorials were not unusual in the area, and Jekyll had written of a youthful interest

¹⁴⁸ Diary of David Alexander Lindsay, Lord Balcarres, 11 March 1899, in Calvert and Boreham, p. 30.

¹⁴⁹ Mary Seton Watts, *The Word in the Pattern* (1905): *A Facsimile with Accompanying Essays on Mary Watts's Cemetery Chapel Drawn from the Watts Gallery Symposium 2010*, ed. by Mark Bills and Desna Greenhow (Surrey: The Society for the Arts and Crafts Movement in Surrey, 2012), p. 11.

¹⁵⁰ See also Mark Bills, *Watts Chapel: A Guide to the Symbols of Mary Watts's Arts and Crafts Masterpiece* (London: Philip Wilson, 2010).

¹⁵¹ TGWA, Mary Watts, Diary 1894, 5 August 1894.

¹⁵² TGWA, Mary Watts, Diary 1896, 23 Feb 1896.

¹⁵³ Calvert and Boreham, p. 182.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

in Surrey gravestones set flat into the grass; Mary's design might thus also be seen as another continuation of local historic method. Mary designed the memorial stones—out of the fifty-nine dateable stones at Compton, twenty have individualized design elements, mostly predating the Great War—and were fairly unusual in their inclusion of the Celtic cross.¹⁵⁵

Beyond providing a biographical signifier to her Scottish heritage, Mary's use of Celtic design should be read as her own contribution to the nineteenth-century interest in “primitive” art. Her pattern designs were meticulously researched, directed both by historic artefact (including the Book of Kells and the Lindisfarne Gospels) and contemporary scholarship. She appears especially interested in the iconographical blending of Christian and Hiberno-Saxon or Celtic motif, much of which can be interpreted in her own scrolling designs and frequent use of the Celtic knot. She relied heavily on works such as Irish illustrator and antiquarian Margaret Stoke's *Early Christian Art in Ireland* (1887), and Arts and Crafts inspired architectural historian W. R. Lethaby's 1892 *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*, in which the author emphasised, crucially for Mary, the common origins of esoteric architectural principles.¹⁵⁶ These origins, Lethaby indicated, were bound up in symbolic references that were historically inherited and appropriated in successive forms, regardless of whether the complimentary meaning was also translated. ‘[T]he main purpose and burthen of sacred architecture’, he suggested, ‘—and all architecture, temple, tomb, or palace, was sacred in the early days—is thus inextricably bound up with a people's thoughts of God and the universe’.¹⁵⁷ Much of Mary's reading was also concerned with delineating pagan influence from Christian; and Celtic ‘heathenism’ from early Christianity—with

¹⁵⁵ See also Guildford Evening Decorative and Fine Arts Society's 2012 Survey *Compton Pottery Memorials in Compton Cemetery* for a catalogue of Compton memorials.

¹⁵⁶ Also Lord Lindsay's 1847 *Sketches of the History of Christian Art*, W. and G. Audsley's *A Handbook of Christian Symbolism* (1865), W. Brindley and W. S. Weatherley's *Ancient Sepulchral Monuments* (1877), a fully illustrated reference volume intended for anyone, who like Mary, wished for a ‘worthier and more satisfactory memorial’; J. R. Allen's *Early Christian Symbolism in Great Britain and Ireland* (1887) (Page and Smith, p. 133; Bills, p. 19; William Brindley and W. Samuel Weatherley, *Ancient Sepulchral Monuments* (London: Vincent Brooks, Day and Son, 1888), Preface).

¹⁵⁷ W. R. Lethaby, *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth* (London: Percival & Co., 1892), p. 2.

Stokes, for instance, identifying the ‘primitive rhythmical designs’ common to ‘barbarous nations’ yet countering this assumed barbarism with the Church’s influence.¹⁵⁸ Stokes claimed the peculiarity of Irish Art to be the union of such primitive pattern with a style according

with the highest laws of the art of design, the exhibition of a fine architectural feeling in the distribution of parts, and such a delicate and perfect execution, whatever the material in which the art was treated, as must command respect for the conscientious artist.¹⁵⁹

This feeling for design, style and execution, whilst not explicitly stressed to the reader, is implied to be the ‘Spirit’ of early Christianity, which Stoke read as differentiating Irish art from other non-Christian “primitive” art forms.¹⁶⁰

Mary did not seem to possess the same impulse to subjugate historical and vernacular sepulchral forms to the influence of early Christianity. Her interests went beyond early Christian art, to Ancient Egypt and Assyria, Buddhism, Brahminism, and Greece.¹⁶¹ She was interested, as always, in pattern, and the transference of meaning between cultures. She attempts to ground her expression of faith within a profusion of widely variant, historically distinct local details, signalling less the epitome of nationality, than the possible, communicable span of human faith. She notes:

In trying to revive in some degree that living quality which was in all decoration when patterns had meaning, the character of our own Celtic art—Ancient British, Irish, and Scottish, as it is, — has been followed.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ Margaret Stokes, *Early Christian Art in Ireland* (London: Chapman and Hall, Limited, 1894), p. viii.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. viii.

¹⁶⁰ Regardless of historical accuracy!

¹⁶¹ She was particularly interested in the subject of ‘the tree of life’—an image she had tracked from the ‘Sardis cult...the bodhi tree...Buddha...ancient Indian texts...Hindu mythology’ and ‘our maypole’; and its branches can be found, weaving between separate chapel elements’ (TWGA, Mary Watts, Chapel Notebook).

¹⁶² Watts, *The Word in the Pattern*, p. 1.

Despite her overall framing of Christianity within the chapel, Mary's reading of the liveness of artefact derives her attempted return to the Celtic in particular: to when patterns "had meaning". It is this character she aims to revive—the local, the (pre)historic, emphasising not its use in promoting a widespread acceptance of faith, but in elucidating the character of an older shared spirit with the capacity for repetition. Mary signals to the pre-existing sanctity of such patterns, even if this sanctity is to provide proof of common faith expression. The liveness of such symbols indicate that it is the local and natural historical that enables her personal application of faith, and not, necessarily, the other way around: her Scottish heritage; her time spent in spiritually endowed landscapes of interweaving greens.

A Haunted Place

For Marry Watts, then, the narrative capacity of the garden enabled an all-encompassing narrative project. The Compton gardens narrate her engagement with contemporary artistic cultures, placing her artistic innovations within a local English landscape extending back into history, and which wove together the Victorian Artist's retreat, the private-public blurring of the Artist at Home, and a village home for art-making, for philanthropy, and for worship. These gardens sit at an intriguing tangent to Jekyll's own cultivations a few miles over. Despite their similar interests, Jekyll's growing renown, burgeoning nursery, and growing authority within gardening society, there is no evidence to suggest Mary ever consulted Jekyll in a professional capacity. Consequently, Compton supplies an insight into the modern garden narrative outside Jekyll. Mary's hunt for vernacular history through primitive motif permits the Compton landscape to suggest a similar impulse towards the union of classical and local cultures, in order to promote the reputations of Wattsonian arts—alluding to George's Renaissance, and Mary's Scottish vernacular. The carefully cultivated Compton village landscape, built in Surrey vernacular, gardened into wood and heath, with its mixing of retreat, studio, industry and memorial, can therefore be read as providing an intriguing assimilative exercise, moving from the traditions of the late-Victorian English

country garden. Mary saw in the garden the opportunity for all kinds of narrations—and in those curling, all-encompassing, interweaving greens, perhaps a master narrative, able to symbolise and narrate her and George’s complimentary missions within Surrey landscapes. Beyond comparisons to Jekyll, Watts’ intriguing blurring of public and private gardens should be interpreted as providing its own singular contribution to garden history. The Watts’ Compton stands at a pivotal point in the presentation of the artist’s country residence in the early twentieth century within fast-changing artistic cultures. It makes a fascinating demonstration of the garden’s relevance and capacity for self-placing within rural England.

In the years following George’s death, Mary’s activities continued, although without the same vitality. She was in many ways content in her established patterns; content in the pottery’s continuing designs, which were not much changed from their early success. Contacted in 1930 regarding taking over as Compton pottery manager, James Elton responded that the place had ‘a sleeping beauty look, with designs of thirty years ago [...] as bad as possible’.¹⁶³ Mary’s pottery was slipping towards obscurity: as Calvert and Boreham note, new, cheaper, concrete-based garden ornament provided a formidable opponent, with streamlined designs making Mary’s appear antiquated.¹⁶⁴ In 1937, the clay seam at Limnerslease was exhausted. Mary would die the following year, on the sixth of September, roughly a year prior to the outbreak of the Second World War.¹⁶⁵

In the post-George years the garden’s memorial capacity was finally fully materialised. The Limnerslease gardens started to make up ‘a haunted place’ where ‘the past seemed more real than the present’—where the past had ‘invaded it and made it its own’.¹⁶⁶ In 1969, Ronald Chapman returned to the mid-twenties Compton of his upbringing in his semi-autobiographical novel *The Education of Davey Porteous*. The Firs, a part-fictionalised Limnerslease, is definitively melancholic: densely wooded right

¹⁶³ James Elton in Calvert and Boreham, p. 82.

¹⁶⁴ Calvert and Boreham, p. 84.

¹⁶⁵ This was not quite the end of the Pottery, which continued, in various forms, without much success, until the 1950s, when land disputes forced its closure (see Calvert and Boreham, p. 91).

¹⁶⁶ Ronald Chapman, *The Education of Davey Porteous* (London: Collins, 1969), p. 6.

up to the house and shrouded in the protagonist's grandmother's mourning for her lost poet husband. Chapman cannot separate this landscape from a lingering memory of Giorgio, George's fictional counterpart. Mary's is a garden for mourning, as Chapman's narrator indicates first a clump of laurel planted to shield Giorgio from the east wind, then the terracotta bench "grandmother" had designed for him to sit and watch his favourite view, and finally the planting, with its tangles of brambles and bracken justified so because 'this was how Giorgio had liked it', despite his far-earlier death.¹⁶⁷ There at first appears a disconnect between this Mary, and the industrious, gardening, artist and designer: the Mary who cultivated a rich landscape to envelop art and domesticity; to interweave vernacular history with personal faith; to insist on the continued relevance of a shared aesthetic vision.

Yet these Marys are intimately connected. The Mary so concerned with the liveness of her heritage, and with the landscaping of gardens to industry and sanctified ornament, did so as much in anticipation of George's passing as she did in pursuit of her own career. The solace of living landscape—the patterns of material and spiritual renewal—imbued her Compton cultivations to enable not just the remainder of a life shared together, but also the remembrance of such a life. Mary's gardens had varied complimentary functions: to create a lived-in, working landscape for communal posterity, and to also form a memorial landscape, drawing back to lost lives and heritages. In this way, despite their recourse back into prehistory, these gardens prioritise posterity above all, even if that posterity is only eventually defined by memory, rather than repeated reinvention.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

3 | Rural Ritual, Gardened Faith: Ford Madox Ford's Memorial Plots ¹

The idea of putting tiny dark objects into the ground fascinates me. Over their germination and growth there is something mysterious and exciting. It is the only clean way of attaining the world's desire.²

Ford Madox Ford is perhaps most commonly known for his “high modernist” works—*The Good Soldier* (1915), a formally explorative account of the loss of English pre-war society, and the Tietjens tetralogy, four novels tracking the cultural legacy of the Great War.³ His most memorable doctrines relate to his Literary Impressionist theories and ‘profound contempt’ for fact in lieu of faithful impression: Ford’s aim to register his times in the ‘terms of his own times’—modern times ‘so hazy, so tenuous, with still such definite and concrete spots’ within them.⁴ This stylistic push for the modern was cultivated through the country garden. Whilst Jekyll and Watts were gardening in Surrey, Ford was digging across a series of Home Counties farmsteads (1894-1903). Within these landscapes he had formed influential literary friendships: with Henry James, living in Rye ‘in a Georgian treasure house with his lawns and his ladies and his flowers’; with Joseph Conrad, working towards Impressionist technique in the parlour of Ford’s Winchelsea farmhouse; and with nearby novelist Stephen Crane and naturalist W. H. Hudson.⁵ He considered all to be Impressionist masters; and would, in the post-war years, come to memorialise them as one with the landscape he attempted to return to after his 1919 military discharge.

¹ Two version of this chapter have been previously published as Hattie Walters, ‘Memorial Digging: Ford Madox Ford, Post-War Sussex, and the Potato’, *The Modernist Review*, January 31, 2020, <https://modernistreviewcouk.wordpress.com/2020/01/31/memorial-digging-ford-post-war-sussex-and-the-potato/>; and Harriet Walters, ‘Rural Ritual, Gardened Faith: Ford Madox Ford’s Memorial Plots’, *Modernist Cultures*, 16 (2021), 242-264.

² Ford Madox Ford, *Return to Yesterday* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1931), p. 171.

³ The Tietjens novels include *Some do Not* (1924), *No more Parades* (1925), *A Man Could Stand Up* (1926) and *The Last Post* (1928).

⁴ Ford Madox Ford, *Ancient Lights and Certain New Reflections: Being the Memories of a Young Man* (London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd, 1911), p. xv; Ford Madox Ford, ‘On Impressionism’, in *Critical Writings*, ed. by Frank MacShane (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965) pp. 33-55 (p. 42).

⁵ Ford Madox Ford ‘Stephen Crane’, *The American Mercury*, January 1936, pp. 36-45 (p. 43).

This chapter examines the importance of the working country garden to Ford's self-placing. It considers the garden's role in his attempt to pin down the personal appeal of rural countryside; in his pursuit for post-war reconstruction; and in his later auto/biographical works that look to place the development of Literary Impressionism in rural England. Beginning with his pre-war works, I consider the non-fictional *The Heart of the Country* alongside early poetry and *The Fifth Queen* saga (1906-1908), to argue for his engagement in the history of English agricultural landscapes. These early works demonstrate keen attention to memorialising the miseries suffered by his contemporaneous rural poor, but Ford also struggles with a complicated need to find and form his own ideal country. This struggle—between a personally romanticised landscape, and between highlighting that hardship—is played out across his early texts, and frames his post-war returns to the garden. Moving to post-war Sussex and Kent, I unpack how the newly discharged Ford aimed to place himself again in that rural landscape. Trying to restore self and country through the cottage garden, he returned to weave semi-fantastical narratives that would sustain his hopes in a countryside whose conditions had not bettered. Ford's reconstruction was ultimately frustrated: he moved from small-holding to small-holding, and then eventually, away from England for good. He nevertheless remained fascinated with re-narrating these landscapes in text. As I finally demonstrate, only when removed from them could he capitulate most fully to his romance of English country—to his faith in the productions of the garden plot—which are revealed to be its facilitation of the relationships behind literary Impressionism, narrated by Ford's return to early years, friends, and gardens. Describing himself as 'an inveterate kitchen-gardener', Ford did not make a high-Jekyll herbaceous border; did not plant explicitly for aesthetic value; or suggest, through the cultivation of the appearance of landscape, how that landscape should look.⁶ Unlike both Jekyll and Watts, the appearance of his schemes had little impact on the making of his narratives: rather, Ford was interested in sustenance. Nevertheless, the plots he cultivated both on and off the page made up his own garden history: a history about appraising landscape, and about the literary innovations stemming from it. And

⁶ Ford Madox Ford, *Provence: From Minstrels to the Machine* (New York: The Ecco Press, 1979), p. 27.

his narratives also offer a tantalising glimpse into the difficulties of interpreting a landscape irreparably altered by war: his cultivations had to adapt as he worked to re-inherit his own pre-war ideals.

This Ford believed in a ritualistic sanctification inherent to gardening, demonstrated in the post-war reminiscences *Thus to Revisit* (1921), *Return to Yesterday* (1931), and *It was the Nightingale* (1934), where he imbued digging for food with an emphasis on the mythic and unknowable; “tiny dark objects” promising the deliverance of at least several meals, and perhaps something beyond. Promise rather than attainment appears key; a waiting and wishing on the possibilities of growth. Within these later memoirs, he demonstrates near-numinous attention to the garden; an attention that had to be squared with his concern for the material poverty of twentieth-century rural England. As well as attempting to impress the character defining his earlier rural years, I argue that these texts ritualise and memorialise everyday experience, merging supernatural and literary elements, and resetting biblical references through domestic, dramatic invocations of the nativity. These dramatisations are mostly situated in the country garden: playing out small-holding disruptions or alluding to communal ritual and a sense of pageantry. It made up an attempt to hold onto a pre-war landscape lost, and in his post-war texts, it was a tactic he would employ to make friends live again. Unlike Mary’s vision of an all-encompassing, part-material and part-spiritual pattern, Ford’s garden “faith” is predominantly secular, yet nevertheless indicates something mythic and beyond, characterised on one hand by rural superstition and literary imagination, and grounded by a belief in the potential of the everyday material. Conrad, James, Crane and Hudson, all figures so important to Ford’s biographical works, become inseparable from Ford’s rural landscapes, appearing canonised in Ford’s remembrance for their merged literary-horticultural talents. We can ultimately understand Ford as a writer fashioning his contribution to modern literature as explicitly formed in and by the English countryside: a landscape nourishing new forms of English literature.

Ford famously emphasised that ‘Life did not narrate, but made impressions on our brains’.⁷ Personal experience was not record: in order to ‘produce’ ‘an effect of life’ on the reader, he and Conrad had come to the opinion that the successful writer ‘must not narrate but render impressions’.⁸ Impressionism, he had previously elaborated, ‘was a frank expression of personality’ where ‘non-Impressionism’ was ‘an attempt to gather together the opinions of as many reputable persons as may be and to render them truthfully and without exaggeration (The Impressionist must always exaggerate)’.⁹ This did not mean that Ford was not interested in making his own histories, and in writing about his own history within English landscape; or that his works and gardens cannot be read as making their own narratives. Max Saunders has indicated how ‘impressionist autobiography renders the distinction between autobiography and fiction peculiarly hard, if not impossible, to draw’.¹⁰ By the necessity of their Impressionist “personality”, Ford’s biographical studies, Saunders continues, are often ‘auto/biographical’—composed of accumulated layers of impressions that tell us as much about Ford as about the thing or person under scrutiny.¹¹ Essential studies in Saunders’ wake have additionally highlighted how Ford’s autobiographies are group projects ‘seamlessly [crossing] the shadow-line from fact to fiction’, redrawing twentieth-century literary history, and how his novels display an impersonal historic sense to evoke the layering and uncovering of past events in the present, recollected suddenly in ‘unreflective engagement’.¹² All are essential critical contexts to Ford studies.

I am less concerned with the aesthetic or epistemological concerns of Ford’s Impressionism (beyond highlighting its capacity to make new, imaginative histories); with the self-reflexivity of Fordian

⁷ Ford Madox Ford, *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1925), p. 194.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

⁹ Ford, ‘On Impressionism’, p. 36.

¹⁰ Max Saunders, *Self Impression: Life-Writing, Autobiografiction, and the Forms of Modern Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 261.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 273.

¹² Jerome Boyd Maunsell, *Portraits from Life: Modernist Novelists and Autobiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p 67; p. 8; Seamus O’Malley, *Making History New: Modernism and Historical Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 29.

biography, or his hunt for the “*mot juste*”, all of which are well-documented.¹³ I centre on the garden and surrounding country, considering how his progressive tendency to memorialise and make his own garden histories that argue for new understandings of English literature as he saw it, placed within an English landscape as he remembered it. In a 1913 letter to fellow writer Lucy Masterman, Ford had delivered a ‘terrific sermon’, asking his reader to ‘forget about Piers Plowman’, Shakespeare, Keats, Yeats, Morris, and the English Bible, remembering instead the present—that ‘terrific, untidy, indifferent empirical age, where not one single problem is solved and not one single Accepted Idea from the past has any more magic’.¹⁴ Ford calls for new forms of expression: expression found in the Fordian garden. As Dowell, narrator of *The Good Soldier* muses, trying to unpick the ‘rambling’ ‘maze’ of his story: ‘I have stuck to my idea of being in a country cottage with a silent listener, hearing between the gusts of the wind...one goes back, one goes forward’.¹⁵ Likewise, one can imagine Ford digging into his plots, turning up the past with forkfuls of ground, constructing new narratives of old lands and friends.

The Heart of Fordian Country: Cabbages, Queens and Pageantry

The ‘mournful’ Pent Farm, tucked beneath the South Downs, was key both to the development of literary Impressionism, and where Ford was thinking deeply about the countryside.¹⁶ Ford and Conrad worked in the candlelit parlour furnished with Pre-Raphaelite cast-offs, and overlooked by the monthly roses that would recur in Ford’s later writings. Here they collaborated: reading aloud, discussing furiously, and

¹³ Max Saunders, *Self Impression: Life-Writing, Autobiographical Fiction, and the Forms of Modern Literature*; Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford: A Dual Life, Volume 1: The World Before the War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford: A Dual Life, Volume II: The After-War World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). I am particularly grateful to Alexandra Harris for sharing her manuscript chapter ‘Just Country: Ford Madox Ford in Sussex’, from her forthcoming monograph, *The Rising Down* (working title). See also Laura Columbino and Max Saunders (ed.) *The Edwardian Ford Madox Ford* (Amsterdam: Rodolpi, 2013).

¹⁴ Ford Madox Ford, *The Letters of Ford Madox Ford*, ed. by Richard Ludwig (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 55.

¹⁵ Ford Madox Ford, *The Good Soldier: A Tale of Passion* (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 2010), p. 134.

¹⁶ Ford Madox Ford, *Joseph Conrad*, p. 35.

driving Ford's Exmoor pony through the downlands, searching for the right expression for 'a ten-acre patch of blue-purple cabbage' for 'quiet hours'.¹⁷ Ford had first moved to the 'jewel-green dark and misty fields' of Bonnington and Romney Marsh, eloping with new wife Elsie.¹⁸ In 1896 they moved to The Pent, leaving in '98 for Grace Cottage in Limsfield before finally returning to Romney Marsh. His friend Olive Garnett remembered the *fin-de-siècle* Ford 'playing' at farming, naming a troop of ducks after her indignant mother and aunts:

When Ford dug the garden [. . .] the ducks stood round him in a semi-circle, waiting to gobble up earthworms. "Lucy is so very greedy", Ford would pronounce in a sorrowful drawl, "she always manages to eat some of Connie's share." "Katie was such a clumsy thing, she broke one of my tomato frames. Really I could *not* feel fond of her, so we had her roast on Sunday. Rather tough".¹⁹

As this anecdote introduces, Ford used his cultivational efforts to tell comical, quasi-biographical stories. As I later examine, these stories indicate his twinning of gardening and writing, demonstrating Ford the rustic storyteller playing rural life as spectacle, and incorporating friends and family into his gardens to tell tall tales toeing strange lines between fiction and fact. However, beyond his propensity for jokes, we are also presented with a Ford deeply interested in the cultivation of rural countryside: an attention defining much of his pre-war writing, and framing his post-war return to the garden.

As within Jekyll and Watts' Surrey gardens, the boundaries of Ford's gardens are always blurred as individuals come visiting and animals break into the landscape. And Ford is also deeply concerned with change. However, where Jekyll laments any visible incursion of modernity, Ford sees change—defined as the interminable cycles of living, suffering, and dying—as both an essential (and even a comforting) component of county life, and to the popular impression of an apparently "old and

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹⁸ Ford Madox Ford, *The Cinque Ports: A Historical and Descriptive Record* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1900), p. 127.

¹⁹ Olive Garnett in Max Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford: A Dual Life*, I, p. 99.

unchanging” countryside. For here one could happen upon ‘the golden roof of a farm that might have been a roof in Caxton’s day’; upon

a ploughman and his team moving swiftly [...] It might have been a coloured picture in a child’s book of today; it might, without the change of a visible detail, have been a picture in a missal. Just over the bank was the great high-road along which the motor-cars screamed [...] we might, for all the eye could see, have been there this afternoon or half a millennium ago, so slowly does always moving change move in the heart of the country.²⁰

Ford was not immune to the sense that rural landscape could impress a connection between modern lands and far older ones—but he did not necessarily fear the impact of modern development on its “spirit”: all could (and did) co-exist in the modern landscape. The spirit of one’s loved landscapes, he determined, could not really alter; but was rather added to by those associative layers through the years. One’s impression of familiar countryside was deeply informed by these layers of memory and imagination: ‘the detritus of the dead’, Ford continues, ‘this dust left, as it were, in a film, is like “the patina” that gives value to old bronzes’—‘We see our country-sides through’ it.²¹ Ford’s pre-war literary landscapes are formed in recognition of this associative layering, imaginatively studded both with bygone Kings and Queens and a modern poor cut off from security and industry. They provide a distinctly conscious attention to the imaginative powers of landscape and its apparent recourse to history: an impulse shared (albeit differently) with Jekyll and Watts; and again integral to the situation of his own brand of aesthetics—in this instance, the formation of literary Impressionism.

Many of the landscapes and personages captivating Ford during these years appear in *The Heart of the Country*, written about his impressions of the countryside of the 1890s. This modern land is that (predominantly Southern) countryside Ford judges ‘most psychologically English’.²² It leaves out most of Yorkshire, runs no further west than Carlisle, and neglects Wales entirely, with an Impressionistic

²⁰ Ford, *Heart*, pp. 216-217.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

²² *Ibid.*, p. xii.

justification: like the familiar boundaries of Jekyll's *Old West Surrey*, published two years earlier, *The Heart of the Country* is Ford's 'personal view of his personal countryside'—'a series of illustrations to country moods' making up no more 'than a mental "composite photograph"' rendered on paper.²³ Like Jekyll, Ford defers to personal impression to justify his vision of rural England: to Jekyll's played-down claim of only promoting her 'notes and impressions' to give 'some idea of the older country life', Ford claims only to 'dispassionately' announce 'no particular message' beyond presenting his landscapes.²⁴ There is an uncanny congruence in their shared expression—between Jekyll's 'series of pictures' and Ford's 'series of illustrations'—indeed, Jekyll's "pictures" sit intriguingly against Ford's 'composite photograph', both presenting knowingly constructed visually imagined syntheses of local rural life capable of characterising a wider England.²⁵ Both also rely on the validity of personal impression, to the point of substituting their impressions for objective fact. Ford's text, however, is more explicit about the possibility for difference between his imagination and what falls beyond, and clearly acknowledges his role in its creation. For "The Heart of the Country", he defines, is representative of a 'sort of ideal', unique to every man's independent impression of rural England: it will differ from person to person.²⁶ Unlike Jekyll, then, Ford opens rural England up to a ubiquity of possible personal countrysides. He is also explicit about its unreality. For crucially, one's "Heart of the Country" — one's ideal countryside—can never really be attained: it is a personal impression; a mirage.²⁷ It is often frustrated by the reality of modern country living, and yet it does not lose its power. His text therefore explores this power: looking to characterise his ideal countryside, but also to consider how it is made up, and what it misses.

The text is scaffolded on the premise that the Heart is an explicitly classed and metropolitan conception, in a prescient foreshadowing of Williams' argument in *The Country and the City*. '[T]his "Country" in inverted commas', he argues, 'may be said to exist only for a more or less lettered, more or

²³ Ibid., p. xi.

²⁴ Jekyll, *Old West Surrey*, p. ix; *Heart*, p. xiii.

²⁵ Jekyll, *Colour*, p. viii; Ford, *Heart*, p. xi; Jekyll, *Wood and Garden*, p. 7; Ford, *Heart*, p. xi.

²⁶ Ford, *Heart*, p. 11.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 11.

less educated, more or less easily circumstanced town class.²⁸ Accordingly, it is ‘The Country of the Townsman’, and in contrast with city life, the Heart and its inhabitants are credited ‘with powers not our own, with a subtle magic, a magnetism more delicate [...] something that lets us think that, in touch with them, we are carried back into touch with an earlier world’.²⁹ To structure his commentary, he provides an autobiographical ‘rustic cosmogeny’ of the townsman’s engagement with his Heart.³⁰ First this individual ‘views the country at a distance’ making ‘nodding’ acquaintances between hedgerows; he then journeys his landscape by short-cuts he has “discovered”; he watches ‘yellow sheep gasping in the washing-troughs, he hears, patterning like a little shower of rain, the sound of the turnip-flea at its devastations’.³¹ From here soon comes his penetration into rustic dwellings and the lives of ‘all sorts of slow, browned creatures of his own species’.³² Now he begins

to speculate upon how the lots of these men may be ameliorated, and, after he has speculated as long as time is granted to him, after he has essayed his own seedlings and garnered his own crops, he will die, and his “things” will be sold, another pressing to occupy his accustomed place.³³

Having provided his “cosmogeny” it was time to follow it, considering each stage in turn.

With his structure in place, Ford’s text meanders through chapters as he wanders his countryside, taking us ‘Between the Hedgerows’, ‘Across the Fields’, ‘In the Cottages’ and beyond to the auctioneer’s sale. His impressions are devoted less to visualising the landscape than to its inhabitants and his characterisation of their lives. This landscape is peopled with a different population to Jekyll’s Old West Surrey: vagrants and miscreants jostle up against eccentric characters. There is Carew, a local tramp: ‘the son of a Guardsman and a prostitute’ familiar to ‘every gaol in the South of England’ and with a hoarded

²⁸ Ibid., p. 23.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 5.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 22.

³¹ Ibid., p. 22.

³² Ibid., p. 22.

³³ Ibid., pp. 22-23.

portfolio of his ‘insolent remarks to magistrates’—certainly not one of Jekyll’s moralising stock figures.³⁴ Then there is the ‘boastful, melodramatic old ruffian’ molecatcher Ned Post, and the hedger and ditcher ‘old Mark Swain’, who had determined that he would not die, but rather ‘be carried up to heaven in a chariot of fire’.³⁵ Another such individual, who makes such a great impression on Ford as to be later immortalised in the post-war *Return to Yesterday* in a chapter entitled ‘Cabbages and Queens’, is Meary Walker. She personifies for Ford the philosophy of the labouring rural poor—making ‘sacred’ a certain ‘heart of the country’ with ‘her arms stained walnut-green’ from picking hops; stooping in her potato patch ‘in immense boots, to drop the seed potatoes into rows’, and unfailingly uttering her personal philosophy “‘Ah keep all on going!’” until three days of illness and consequent death.³⁶

Here lies the most glaring difference between Ford and Jekyll’s countrysides. Where Jekyll’s Surrey is populated by picturesque nonagenarians able to narrate a historic England worth preserving (one old, but not dead yet), death is omnipresent in Ford’s countryside. Dyspepsia runs rampant; the field labourer’s diet ‘is atrocious; it is atrociously cooked: his cottage, as a rule, is insanitary, draughty, damp, and too small. His work is too hard’.³⁷ Labourers die “‘sweering dreadful’” or suddenly and quietly from the cold, and Ford moves to memorialise figures by name. Old Sam the hop-dryer, suffering from ‘delirium tremens’, dies on the floor; Ned Post and Mark Swain pass ‘in the same workhouse in the same winter week’.³⁸ ‘A dead man is to the countryman’, Ford notes, ‘of hardly more account than a dead mole’.³⁹ Representative of this familiar progression from (hard) work to death, Meary is queen of Fordian Country, and Ford cannot help but indicate her biographical similarities with the actual queen of England, being ‘just a month younger’.⁴⁰ ‘There is still’, Ford tells us, ‘only one Queen in the cottages’—Meary.⁴¹

³⁴ Ibid., p. 40; p. 41; p. 42.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 49; p. 97.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 110.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 160.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 95; p. 49.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 96.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 111.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 111.

Ford may be observing from an acknowledged cultural distance, tracing the foot-paths of farmhands, and sitting with Conrad, working towards new literary technique, but penetrating through his self-conscious impression of “The Heart of the Country” is his attention to pulling real country conditions and characters from the popular romance threatening to subsume them, and an attention to making explicit the role of personal impression in how we think about the countryside.⁴²

Ford is, as noted, clear about the frustrations necessitated by an ideal countryside: it is after-all a romance of memory and imagination prompting the ‘belief that the earth holds valleys filled with romance and mystery’— ‘imagined and shadowy pageants’, he describes, capable of distraction, of reaching from present landscape to some kind of immaterial sustenance.⁴³ He dwells on the insubstantial, imaginative inhabitants that might be called up: a ‘whole gallantry-show’ of imagined ‘kings and queens in mediaeval garnitures passing dimly from door to door’.⁴⁴ These pageants make diversions into imagined pasts and histories called up by investing in the romance of landscape—diversions that nevertheless begin to become an implicit part of the landscape’s integral character. Such a movement between one’s impressions and imaginations offers that relief that with the ‘sudden movement of the hop tendrils’ ‘we are no longer alone in a dead world’—that we too will all take part in that inevitable cycle that turns over the centuries.⁴⁵ It was a relief which mitigated those other horrors of the countryside—the labourers working and failing and being replaced—a relief deriving from a jarring romance with its hooks in cosmopolitan culture despite all evidence to its insubstantiality.

Such considerations add a sharp edge to more popularly idyllic narratives of country living: read against them, Jekyll’s *Old West Surrey* gains an additional sense of souring flimsiness, and yet also, somehow, a narrative urgency. This modern countryside was not one that could be neutrally enjoyed, but rather invited fears about its longevity as well as its ability to sustain. Ford does offer some solutions: his

⁴² Olive Garnett in Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford: A Dual Life, Volume I*, p. 99.

⁴³ Ford, *The Heart of the Country*, p. 16.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

penultimate chapter ‘Utopia’ proposes the hypothetical tending of 50,000 acres, with ‘42,000 split into ‘400 holdings of between 1 and 10 acres a piece’ for the occupation of ‘10,000 souls’.⁴⁶ The opening of a syndicate, he expands, ‘where every voter of a district could purchase on the lowest reasonable terms the right to a certain occupation of a certain minimum extent of land for a certain limit of time’, could alleviate the current system where all who live from the land were ‘exhausted’, and where there was ‘no chance’ of upward mobility for either the agricultural labourer or the small holder.⁴⁷ If there was no opportunity for bettering one’s position, Ford judged that there was little use campaigning for ex-country folk to return from the towns. ‘Perhaps’, he aptly muses, ‘it is to be the fate of the country [...] to just become one large playground for millionaires. In essentials, large stretches of England have for many years part been little else than that’.⁴⁸ Dwelling elsewhere on the improbability of rural reform (and the unlikeliness of the workforce organising), he turns from the death of Meary to the exodus of the next generation’s labourers. As the field workers of his countryside die off or leave, ‘it is the real heart of the country that is growing a little colder’, he surmises.⁴⁹ Despite his interest in the situation of the rural poor, like Jekyll, Ford wishes to stay the passing of an older, idealised landscape, even whilst he questions it. Perhaps, facing the unlikeliness of reform, all that was left was to memorialise it.

Ford’s pre-war solution to sustaining the liveness of modern rural landscape was through textual, ritualisations of history, enacted within his historical fictions. In *The Fifth Queen* saga (1906–08), the imagined pageants of *The Heart of the Country* are visualised through forays into an England gone by. Ford centres on the ascent (and demise) of Katherine Howard, a figure subject to different machinations than Meary and her seed potatoes. Ford had originally planned a study of Henry VIII (but had been beaten to it by a historian at the British Library) and wanted something to show for spending

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 189.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 192; p. 188.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 172.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 131.

a great part of ten years grubbing up facts about Henry VIII. I worried about his parentage, his diseases, the size of his shoes, the price he gave for kitchen implements, his relation to his wives, his knowledge of music'.⁵⁰

He focused instead on the political schemes he viewed forming modern England—the machinations of Thomas Cromwell and kind that had ‘welded England into one formidable whole’.⁵¹ His ten fact-finding years made up much of the pre-war time Ford spent in the country, and were also those years upon which *Heart of the Country* is based. The processes of research and farm-work are twinned, as Ford grubs up his “facts” from the earth. Whilst comedic, Ford’s Tudor worries are strangely domestic, yet *The Fifth Queen* ends up the opposite. As Seamus O’Malley notes, the novels’ ‘vocabulary and syntax are chosen to evoke the Tudor era’ in a classically Fordian manner.⁵² His impression of the sixteenth century was derived in part from the paintings of Holbein the Younger, and so Ford’s Tudor England is predominantly indoors—peopled by lords that ‘no longer ride hunting’.⁵³ The novels are composed mostly from low-lit rooms and subtle manipulations, as characters stalk between chambers and skulk in corners. Consequently, the comparable absence of a working English countryside appears as a landscaped commentary on the romance of modern rural England: an England he was trying to memorialise.

As with his palaces, Ford’s Tudor gardens facilitate the machinations of power. When they appear, they are passages funnelling protagonists together, and the stage for introductions within enclosed, horticultural rooms with high walls. Howard is first introduced as Queen to the Cardinal’s Garden, and another garden directs her first meeting with the Tudor King. On the lawns of the surrounding parkland, Lutherans await the arrival of the new Queen Ann, gathering to sing ‘triumphant hymns’ whilst the king can be glimpsed ‘shining even in the grey among the trees along the long garden

⁵⁰ Ford Madox Ford, ‘On Impressionism’, p. 38.

⁵¹ Ford Madox Ford, *The Spirit of the People: An Analysis of the English Mind* (London: Alston Rivers, 1907), p. 91.

⁵² O’Malley, p. 30.

⁵³ Ford Madox Ford, *Hans Holbein the Younger: Critical Monograph* (London: Duckworth & Co., 1905), p. 12.

wall'.⁵⁴ This space sets the stage for a riot, as 'all in among the winter trees the City men in their white and silver' fight the Lutherans, clad in grey frieze.⁵⁵ Katherine, astride a grey mule lead by her cousin Thomas Culpepper, is caught in the fray, before being granted passage to the apparent safety of the King's garden. Inside, the pair are immediately lost within long alleys and misty avenues of tall, frosted trees. They enter a 'desolate region of clipped yews, frozen fountains and high, trimmed hedges' and are directed steadily to the riverfront terrace upon which the king is pacing.⁵⁶

These gardens have a distinct design, characterised by clipped, hedged avenues fencing the traveller onto a specific path, and Ford's scene is bathed in grey. The Lutherans wear grey, the spaces between trees are grey, Katherine's mule is grey, and the still scene is cast with occasional glimmers from the King and the city men, gently upsetting its homogeneity. And despite the obstructions Katherine and her cousin face—obscured avenues, missed turnings, and their sudden, violent admittance to the garden—Ford's space continually delivers them onwards, through walks of tall yews to the King. The mist and high hedging prevent any other possible walkway being visible. Despite the obvious wealth of their surroundings, there is a sparseness to it, and a lack of garden-work—inevitable, perhaps, as this garden is a stately one demonstrative above all of wealth and status.⁵⁷ Aside from the travellers and the pacing monarch, these gardens are stationary spaces, and despite Ford's suggestion that these characters have been delivered into safety, this enclosed space is imposing, and only really delivers Howard to her eventual fate. Ford's palatial garden is staged: complete with costumed lords pacing and Lutherans singing; awaiting Katherine's weary and be-cloaked approach astride a mule. Her arrival resets biblical narrative as the groups gather outside the walls to chorus triumphant hymns, unaware that they are greeting their future queen with their current. However, unlike the journeying to Bethlehem and new life, Howard's oblivious garden procession directs her to later execution. The safe garden space offers another

⁵⁴ Ford Madox Ford, 'The Fifth Queen', in *The Fifth Queen* (London: Vintage Classics, 2011), pp. 9-242 (p. 33). 33.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁵⁷ For an essential study on the make-up of the early-modern garden, see Jill Francis, *Gardens and Gardening in Early Modern England and Wales, 1560-1660* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

mirage. Ford's recourse into history—his imagined pageant—processes Howard only to her inevitable fate.

Later, in *The Fifth Queen Crowned* (1908), an inaugurated Howard journeys to the Castle of Pontefract in West Yorkshire—the very edge of Ford Country. From the terrace she surveys her realm: this 'land [is] too green, the fields too empty of dwellings', populated only by sheep.⁵⁸ Any homesteads 'had fallen to ruin beneath the boughs'.⁵⁹ No men were visible, nor ploughland. Howard determines to 'ride east and west and south each day' whilst the king continues north.⁶⁰ She has mind to change the land—to 'do away with the sheep'—'for it was the sheep that had brought discontent to England. To make way for these fleeces the ploughmen had been dispossessed'.⁶¹ Howard's plans put agriculture at the heart of politics, signalling Ford's concern with fields and labourers, whilst conflating an absence of (visible) labour with improper land management. It should be noted that Ford is also making a second conflation: his Howard is a devout Catholic, and by the *Fifth Queen Crowned*, has succeeded (if only briefly) in convincing the King to return England to Catholicism. In one sense, Howard's "sheep" are the Protestants of England, and their "dispossessions" a metaphor for the attempted Puritan reform of the late Cromwell, who was executed the day of Howard's crowning, leaving her temporarily free to dream of her own reforms.

However, taking seriously Ford's process of "grubbing up" facts, we can also read this metaphor as informed by sixteenth-century agricultural discord. Whilst the sheep-corn economy (where sheep were grazed on pasture during the day and folded on arable land at night) was well-established in the Yorkshire Wolds by the sixteenth century, Briony A. K. McDonagh has highlighted how the expansion of sheep-farming in the period has also been linked to the depopulation of rural Yorkshire through early-modern

⁵⁸ Ford Madox Ford, 'The Fifth Queen Crowned', in *The Fifth Queen* (London: Vintage Classics, 2011), pp. 429-607 (p. 438).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 438.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 438.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 442.

enclosure.⁶² These privatisations were frequently premised on the conversion of arable land to pasture due to low grain prices and high wages; the progressive disenfranchisement of local labouring populations led to riots and to clusters of villages deserted through successive processes of depopulation occurring steadily up through the Enclosure acts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁶³ These local enclosures were part of a wider national movement narrated in both parliamentary and literary sources from the period: one 1548 proclamation (incorrectly) declared that two thirds of England was untilled and in ‘marvellous desolacion’; and in ‘Liber V’ of the *Virgidemiarum* (1597), Joseph Hall would satirise the efforts of rural landlords as encompassed by ‘dunged foldes of dag-tayled sheepe, / And ruined house where holy things were said’.⁶⁴ It is hard not to read Ford’s Katherine’s impression of ruined homesteads, sheep, and dispossessed ploughmen within such a light.

Both the contexts of early-modern enclosure and the lingering structures of long-uninhabited settlements were of cumulative interest to late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century histories and geographies of England landscape: Maurice Beresford has surveyed how the nineteenth-century Ordnance Survey mapping of Yorkshire (begun 1849) had started to move beyond the mapping of ancient barrows to uncover the remains of later depopulations.⁶⁵ Likewise, early-twentieth-century agrarian histories, like

⁶² Edward I. Newman, ‘Medieval Sheep-Corn Farming: How Much Grain Yield could Each Sheep Support’, *The Agricultural History Review*, 50 (2002), 164-180 (p. 164); Briony A. K. McDonagh, ‘Subverting the ground: Private Property and Public Protest in the Sixteenth-Century Yorkshire Wolds’, *The Agricultural History Review*, 57 (2009), 191-206 (p. 193).

⁶³ See also Alan Harris, ‘The Lost Village and the Landscape of the Yorkshire Wolds’, *The Agricultural History Review*, 6 (1958), 97-100. In addition, Joan Thirsk has suggested that the early-modern arable farmer was ‘held superior’ to the pasture farmer due to the popular conception that England had once solely been composed of great forests: the successful tending of corn-land and other cereals could consequently be considered as the highest point in of man’s dominion over nature. Read along the lines of this hierarchy, Ford’s Howard might demonstrate a fitting concern with the “highest” forms of cultivation--although her concerns seem to, like Ford, predominantly register the social costs of agricultural economies (Joan Thirsk, *Chapters from the Agrarian History of England and Wales*, III ed. by Joan Thirsk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 17).

⁶⁴ Proclamation of 1 June 1548, in Edwin F. Gay, ‘Inclosures in England in the Sixteenth Century’, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 17 (1903), 576-597 (p. 587); Joseph Hall, ‘Liber V’, in *Virgidemiarum: Satires* (Edinburgh: 1824), pp. 79-92 (p. 83).

⁶⁵ Maurice Beresford, “‘The Spade Might Soon Determine It’: The Representation of Deserted Medieval Villages on Ordnance Survey Plans, 1849-1910”, *The Agricultural History Review*, 40 (1992), 64-70 (p. 65). Whilst Beresford focuses on the representation of medieval villages in particular, his study provides an intriguing glimpse into nineteenth-century methods of site interpretation, demonstrating a progressive interest in later and later settlement forms.

Edwin F. Gay's 'Inquisitions of Depopulation in 1517 and the Domesday of Inclosures' (1900) and 'Inclosures in England in the Sixteenth Century' (1903), collected evidence for the national 'decline of tillage' under 'covetous inclosers'; although Gay also recommended treating the period's textual sources with a 'mistrustful caution'—the 'very exaggeration' of the Tudor visions of untilled ruin and dunged folds, he argued, 'condemns' them as proof of the scale of the dispossession.⁶⁶ Gay continued to suggest that 'the terrifying spectre' produced by Tudor textual responses to enclosure was 'contemporary hysteria', and a marker of 'the hide-bound conservatism and of the English peasant', enabling a more pronounced reaction to the uprooting than he read as being felt in the depopulation of the twentieth-century countryside.⁶⁷ However, whilst historians might have pushed for a sceptical reception of the realities behind early-modern literature, this was not Ford's way: the Impressionist, we are reminded, 'must always exaggerate' in their pursuit of a faithful impression of the spirit of an age—and any impression would inevitably be marked with the author's personality.⁶⁸ When later considering his years "grubbing up" contradictory accounts of Tudor history, he determined that the facts themselves were 'delusive' and that he knew 'nothing whatsoever', except that Henry VIII 'was a gentleman with red whiskers who always went first through a door'—an impression he had taken from the modern literary imagination of Guy de Maupassant.⁶⁹ If facts were ultimately delusive, what was the use of divesting the personal, early-modern impressions of enclosure of their exaggeration? Modern literature had its own special power: the power to make visible the author's impressions of the connection of history to the present. Read in tandem with the associative layers of *The Heart of the Country*, Ford's impression of the management of sixteenth-century countryside becomes equally about the management of a far more modern one, and therefore a way to draw associations across periods.

⁶⁶ Gay, p. 576; p. 588 p. 587; for a useful study of twentieth-century agrarian history's development upon Gay's theories, see John Martin, 'Sheep and Enclosure in Sixteenth-Century Northamptonshire', *The Agricultural History Review*, 36 (1988), 39-54

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 588.

⁶⁸ Ford, 'On Impressionism', p. 36.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

This layering appears most explicit when Ford positions himself as if he were in dialogue with his protagonist. Listening to the Lady Rochford lament Anne Boleyn's death, and 'afraid of no omens', Howard hums a melancholy tune for which Ford provides the words:

When all the little hills are hid in snow,
And all the small brown birds by frost are slain,
And sad and slow
The silly sheep do go,
All seeking shelter to and fro—
Come once again
To these familiar, silent, misty lands—⁷⁰

Here Ford turns towards community with a "stately" song, claiming the cultural familiarity of her tune. Howard's melody 'goes with the words' he provides, assumedly shared words, but actually his own and already published as 'VI. To a Tudor Tune' (1901).⁷¹ By joining protagonist and author, Ford assimilates Howard's reformational hopes with his own narrative on the formation of modern England in a shared ditty commemorating lost lands. Katherine's attitude to omen will shortly be shown as folly, and no religio-agricultural dreams will save her, as Ford's narrative continues down its determined path. Howard is severed from the heart of Fordian Country as the bare untilled lands and still gardens serve only the machinations of the (early) modern state, and not its peoples, and Ford's return to an older England traces a narrative backwards from his modern countryside. However, unlike the narratives of Jekyll and Watts, he does not impose a lineage justifying his own cultivations. Instead, he prefigures the demise of a modern rural England, tended by a similarly dispossessed workforce also abandoned by the gentry. By returning to the early-modern landscapes so venerated in late nineteenth-century craze for "doing up" rural property, he appears to twist the knife on uncomplicatedly sentimental narrations of English countryside. His modern landscapes, undergoing a complementary process of depopulation, are 'growing

⁷⁰ Ford, 'The Fifth Queen Crowned', p. 543.

⁷¹ It first appeared in *The Academy*, on 31 August 1901 (p. 179); but was later collected in Ford Madox Ford, 'To A Tudor Tune', in *Selected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997), p. 21.

a little colder' (albeit not yet covered in frost).⁷² Perhaps they are doomed as Katherine Howard, musing on her uncompleted plans for the agricultural reformation of sixteenth-century England.

Returning to the turn of the twentieth-century, Ford's 1897 *Poems for Pictures* prefigures Howard's melodic agrarianism, expressing later rural conditions through ritual. 'The Peasant's Apology' is typical of this volume, albeit shorter than most. The eight-line poem concisely informs us that 'On the steaming furrows / Things are harsh and black enough / Dearth there is and lack enough', before noting that sorrow supersedes mirth 'Till she borrows / Bitterness and blackness from the earth'.⁷³ A cheerful, idyllic pastoral it is not, as the poem's conciseness summarises Ford's understanding of the peasant's plight. 'Auctioneer's Song' continues to comment on the selling of a dead farmer's belongings. After informing us that 'the farmer has broken', Ford rhythmically calls the community to witness the auction, listing items for sale. At first, this is the stock: the flock from fold and field, the furrow team brought to 'see what they yield', before progressing to household objects.⁷⁴ 'Bring all you can find' we are told,

Take the clock from the wall,
The crocks from the dairy,
The arm-chair and all.
Tear the prints from the wall.⁷⁵

Verse-breaks are punctuated with the cries 'Coom Up!' and 'Bid Up!'.⁷⁶ Mourning is displaced through the communal dismantling of household to exist instead within group spectatorship, the farmer's life reduced to the sum of his parts. A complimentary gathering is later expanded on in 'L'Envoi' of *The Heart of The Country*. There on the grass, we are told, 'lie all the paraphernalia with which a man throughout his life attempted to stave off the bare terror of the four walls of his rooms'.⁷⁷ Here is another macabre disavowal of the solace of country respite—and a recontextualisation of Jekyll's catalogue of

⁷² Ford, *Heart of the Country*, p. 131.

⁷³ Ford Madox Ford, 'The Peasant's Apology', in *Selected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet), p. 11.

⁷⁴ Ford Madox Ford, 'Auctioneer's Song', in *Selected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet), p. 11.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁷⁷ Ford, *Heart of the Country*, p. 205.

“typical” country artefacts. Instead of making their way into museums as curiosities, these remnants of rural living repeatedly circulate through a fast-changing population: emblematic of the loss of lives over local colour.

Nevertheless, despite its sombre setting, Ford’s conclusion to *Heart* possesses a feeling of pageantry. This is partly due to Ford’s style—combining focus on particularities like the worn armchair ‘throne’, the huddled sheep, and the laughing crowd, with Ford’s insistence on the regularity of such an event. At one stage ‘a small nimble pony’ ‘breaks away from the knot of traps tethered at the further gateway. With its little dog-cart behind it, it runs round and round in the field as if it were performing some circus feat’.⁷⁸ Shortly after, the occupants of a motor-car ‘enter the field as if they were masquers of *Henry VIII*’.⁷⁹ Ford’s acknowledged performance is augmented upon consideration that this is not a one-time play but a ritualistic and regular occurrence: one again stretching imaginatively back into history. The house auction becomes ‘poignant notice of failure, decay and change’, and taking us through the newspaper he continues: ‘[h]ere is Ruffian’s Hill [...] Well, Higgins is gone; old Hooker has failed’.⁸⁰ After one renter has supplanted another, Ford notes how

one forgets, somehow, that old Hooker died before the telegraph office was opened at the Corner. One forgets even that he was there before the new tenants came to the Hall, and it startles one to hear them say they do not even remember old Hooker’s mother, who trotted about on old sticks.⁸¹

These enacted auctions occur over and over with the irrepressible deaths of the rural poor, up to the point of forgetfulness. We have moved from imagined pageants to real ones, and might now consider his continual re-enactment of the auction as commemoration. As Ford’s dramatisation of the rural auction within ‘The Auctioneer’s Song’ and *The Heart of the Country* indicate (and even, perhaps, in Howard’s song), the death of one, and the ritualisation of such an event, entails the commemoration of all. After-all,

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 206.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 207.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 210.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 211.

whilst we might ‘lament’ each death, ‘each of these changes hallows for us some spot; each of them renders some corner of a corner more sacred, more intimately our own by right of memories’: memories and ‘films of dust’ and ‘makings of histories’.⁸² Across Ford’s early works, his imagined pageants work to impress these landscapes of association and memory: to provide faithful impressions of country conditions and character, and to highlight the role of imagination and personality in making histories about landscape. When he next returned to cultivate this landscape after the Great War, he was also looking for restoration. He was to aim to re-place himself within this countryside: to find solace, even, in its most miserable consistencies.

Post War Ford: Cultivating Reconstruction

And I have always believed that, given a digging-fork and a few seeds and tubers, with a quarter’s start, I could at any time wrest from the earth enough to keep body and soul together.⁸³

In the first days of April 1919, Ford was digging in a potato patch at Red Ford cottage near Pulborough, awaiting the arrival of his lover, Australian painter Stella Bowen. An empty, seventeenth-century labourer’s cottage, Red Ford felt remote and appropriately steeped in history, was full of red-brick and red-tiles, was papered in green moss, and cost five shillings a week. It was also damp, leaky-roofed and rat-ridden with rotten lathes and sunken ceilings. However, opposed to the greyness of Ford’s palatial *Fifth Queen* gardens, Red Ford was as warmly hued as its name: coloured red and orange from its sandstone cliffs to its architectural features, flanked by a great oak, nestled under a sandstone cliff, and facing a meadow, and a ‘scarlet and orange runlet’.⁸⁴ The plot nevertheless seemed at first unwelcoming, as Ford described the ‘moribund’ building creaking with superstition as the ancient rafters worked ‘their

⁸² Ibid., p. 212.

⁸³ Ford Madox Ford, *It was the Nightingale* (London: William Heinemann, 1934), p. 49.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 9.

sockets in the walls'.⁸⁵ However, Red Ford was the setting for his attempted post-war reconstruction: both of self, and of the assumptions that governed daily pre-war life. As Ford notes of the period in the 1934 *It was the Nightingale*, the horrors of war had led any prior expectation of the solidity of society to be diminished. Buildings now seemed thin shells 'that could be crushed as walnuts were crushed', all life could suddenly disappear into 'scarlet viscosity', and it would be a long time before even an omnibus could be regarded simply 'as something which should carry you smoothly along the streets of everyday life', now tainted by its association with journeys over the 'tortured earth'.⁸⁶ From this description of post-war experience, Ford moves to his cure: seeds, tubers, and a plot of land from which to 'wrest from the earth enough to keep body and soul together'.⁸⁷ It is his faith in this cure which sustains his restorations of self and land. As Ford worked to again be a part of a countryside loved and threatened with loss, this countryside was now imbued with additional contexts: both of post-war restoration, and of his severance from pre-war rural England.

Ford attempted reconstruction in the country garden. Whilst this was a garden formed in recourse to his interest in cultivating his ideal countryside, he was primarily invested in kitchen gardening and agricultural cultivation rather than aesthetic value, and first and foremost, his gardens served practical and economical purposes. Consequently, it is with practicalities that Ford was mostly occupied:

for the rotation of crops on a quarter of an acre of sandy soil that has to be at once a formal garden and the main food supply for a couple, of the tiniest income—that is a subject for endless thought.⁸⁸

From 1919-1922 he possessed various agricultural goals, including the generation of a system providing free admonishment of nutrition to plants, and the evolution of the disease-free potato: his renewed recognition of the importance of agriculture to both local and national post-war economies. The potato

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 48-49.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁸⁸ Ford Madox Ford, *No Enemy* (New York: The Ecco Press, 1984), p. 11.

possessed a history of connection to social reform: at mid-century, Lead Director of the Potato Virus Station, Redcliffe N. Salaman, would claim that it played an essential role in quelling early-nineteenth-century labour riots (that ‘England escaped such a violent upheaval’, he argues, ‘must, in large measure be placed to the credit of the potato’).⁸⁹ So reliant was the impoverished agricultural class on the potato that Cobbett characterised it as the ‘lazy-root’ and the ‘root of extreme unktion’, due to it appearing emblematic of economic degradation; nevertheless, Salaman suggests that by the 1840s the potato was ‘essential’ in most households, a necessity assured by a loaf costing 10*d.*, to the labourer’s wage of 5*s.*-8*s.* weekly.⁹⁰

The potato’s great social second wind came with the Great War and the accompanying mounting food crisis (1914-1916), answered in part with potatoes. Between the close of 1916 and the 1918 harvest an additional 190,000 acres were devoted to potatoes for the War effort—various acres, like at Munstead, on the lawns of great country houses.⁹¹ In 1918 the potato harvest brought in 9,220,000 tons of potatoes, with the average citizen’s potato consumption rising from 3.67 *lb.*-5.26 *lb.* weekly.⁹² Such was the importance of the potato to wartime economy that national measures were put in place to mitigate the effects of common potato diseases: the Board of Agriculture set up a Wart-Testing Station in 1914; and blight remained a significant issue in particularly potato-dense areas despite attempted treatments.⁹³ January 1919 saw Potato Warts hit Kent for the first time, and by June the *Kent Messenger* report on the first yearly confirmed cases of Blight in Penzance and imploring locals to remain vigilant; although Sussex stayed mostly clear.⁹⁴ Ford had some limited success with his own efforts, noting how ‘of say fifty different plants by the end of 1922 I had succeeded in selecting nine that seemed to be reasonably new

⁸⁹ Redcliffe N. Salaman, *The History and Social Influence of the Potato* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1949), p. 542.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 532.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 575.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 576; p. 577. So great was the answer that 1917 saw a superabundance of potatoes (*Agrarian History of England and Wales*, VIII, p. 110).

⁹³ *Agrarian History of England and Wales*, p. 3; p. 42

⁹⁴ ‘Potato Wart Disease in Kent’, *Kentish Express*, 25 January 1919, p. 2; ‘Potato Disease (Blight)’, *Kent Messenger & Gravesend Telegraph*, 21 June 1919, p. 2.

varieties', two apparently disease resistant.⁹⁵ Unfortunately, any success went unrecognised, with Ford lamenting his failure to place at the local agricultural fair. These nevertheless seemed to be 'halcyon days'—an 'era of reconstruction'—and 'each human being had his own plan for the salvation of humanity', and so he set upon his potatoes, leaning on his spade handle to 'dream long dreams'.⁹⁶ He assumed faith in the land, encouraged by his belief in the salvation of the earth, and with this faith came rules immersed within rural ritual. He notes that observing superstition confirmed him gardening luck: one must 'propitiate', he states, 'the little winged devils of doubt and destiny'—one must take succour in the ritualisations and folklore of the local landscape.⁹⁷ Specifically, Ford 'always' seeded 'whilst the moon was waxing'; would 'never begin a planting on a Friday or a 13th but always on a 9th, an 18th, or a 27th'; attached 'superstitious reverence to certain favourite plants or beds'; and would fetch a bottleful of water from neighbourhood wishing wells for a first spring watering.⁹⁸ This reliance on a personal folk "spirituality" augmented his garden exploits with much hoped for significance: this garden needed to provide more than one kind of sustenance. Perhaps such sustenance could be imagined into being.

The development of Ford's garden is laid out across his 1919 correspondence with Bowen, who remained in London whilst Ford began work. Through daily letters, the pair planned renovations, discussed cokernut matting and distempering the walls. Flowers were not forgotten, and Ford wrote to Bowen requesting suitable materials: marigolds, any annuals of Bowen's fancy from Carter's or Sutton's—perhaps even, we might wager, some of Jekyll's Munstead cultivations. Day by day brought notice of new supplies—the 6th and 7th of April delivering much sought-after nasturtiums, seed potatoes, and a tiled border ('wh. was no end of a job'), and new letters fresh requests for seeds such as 'flageolets, salsifies, & good sorts of early main-crop peas' (April 5th).⁹⁹ April 13 saw the planning of a campaign

⁹⁵ Ford, *Nightingale*, p. 108.

⁹⁶ Ford, *Nightingale*, p. 106.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁹⁹ Ford Madox Ford, *The Correspondence of Ford Madox Ford and Stella Bowen*, ed. by Sondra J. Stang and Karen Cochran (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 67-70,

with the arriving flower seeds. Ford claimed unfamiliarity with Latin names—preferring popular folk ‘names like Love in a mist and Sweet William and Love Lies Bleeding and Old Man’s Beard’, and indicates that he will buy flower plants to continue his cottage scheme: ‘pinks—wh. I love above all flowers, and carnations—wh. are the flowers of love—and Hollyhocks’.¹⁰⁰ Here again appears a cottage garden studded with familiar favourites, designed to fit right in with the landscape Ford had hoped to return to. And this too had imaginative possibility. In an early letter to Bowen, Ford surveys the plot:

you never mentioned the box hedge under the windows!! It must have taken centuries to grow. If we stayed here we could cut it into wonderful things. Peacocks & sundials!¹⁰¹

Ford’s excitement derives from the garden’s historicity and its imaginative potential: the aged hedge can be cut into ‘wonderful’ new shapes—prompts for new tales, even. We could link his box vision to the Tudor world of *The Fifth Queen*, but it also appears a whimsical teaser of Fordian fictive histories to be told. The space offered possibility, history, and a plot to work in: Ford’s imagined and shadowy pageants revitalised for the post-war climate. The post-war Ford turned to his plot and his agricultural goals to attempt to locate himself again within a local, age-old landscape.

Unsurprisingly, Ford’s goals encompassed livestock, and he dreamt of purchasing a small herd of Sussex Black pigs. Ford’s Sussex Black (‘the largest Hog in the world—the size and compactness of the rhinoceros’) is most likely the gargantuan Large Black breed, now considered a critically rare breed within England.¹⁰² These ‘large black beauties’ had stalked Ford’s thoughts since a Storrington conference address given by a Mr. Edge of Gallop’s Homestead, in 1919.¹⁰³ The breed was considered a profitable investment: ‘the owner of the Large Blacks can always find a market as he has meat suitable for the butcher at all periods of maturity’, reported the *Leicester Daily Post* in 1920.¹⁰⁴ The following year,

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 74.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 64.

¹⁰² Ford, *It was the Nightingale*, p. 111; Richard Yarwood and Nick Evans, ‘The Changing Geography of Rare Livestock Breeds in Britain’, *Geography: Journal of the Geographical Association*, 84 (1999), 80-87 (p. 81).

¹⁰³ Ford, *It was the Nightingale*, p. 111.

¹⁰⁴ W. M. Pepper, ‘Leicestershire Farms and Farmers’, *Leicester Daily Post*, 3 July 1920, p. 4.

the *Kentish Express* reported the annual Spring show and sale of the Kent and Sussex Farmers Limited. ‘Large Blacks were represented in great strength’—so much so that the periodical reported winners across three main sections: the Large Blacks (of which there were 16 placings); middle whites, and ‘any other pure breed’.¹⁰⁵ The overall top pig was also a Large Black, being awarded the substantial prize of 50 guineas—worth approximately four years of rent at Red Ford.¹⁰⁶ However, beyond the pigs themselves, Edge’s husbandry methods appeared especially tempting to post-war agriculture, with Edge’s open-air pig-rearing methods appearing in the 1919 London *Sphere*. Edge prophesied outdoor pig-rearing, and reporter R.P.H recounts ‘wandering over the beautiful Sussex downs’ to see hundreds of Edge’s pigs ‘revelling in the fresh air and sunshine’, whilst ‘millions of human beings were sweltering in the slum and city’.¹⁰⁷ The breed made such an impression on early twentieth-century farming consciousness that a reminiscence of a journalist’s first meeting with Edge appeared in *Sussex Agricultural* in 1945.¹⁰⁸ It is not hard to see the appeal of such conditions to post-war England, and to Ford, spade in hand, living hand-to-mouth, and recuperating from the scarlet viscosity of The Great War.

In full subscription to Edge’s porcine philosophy, Ford plotted the scraping together of funds, so that he could complete his small-holding idyll with

a miraculous tuber and a Large Black Sow to the accompaniment of fork, drake, donkey, old mare, goat, stable-boy, with the background of heavy green June grass laced with the streak of scarlet of a rivulet.¹⁰⁹

It is hard not to read more elements of pageantry in this scarlet and green setting. Whilst Ford hopes that the sow and potato will soon accompany the rest of the Fordian cast, they supposedly already accompanied Ford about the countryside: the goat (‘called Penny, because it had a certain resemblance to

¹⁰⁵ ‘Pedigree Pigs: Show & Sale at Ashford’, *Kentish Express*, 5 March 1921, p. 8.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁰⁷ R. P. H, ‘Golden Pigs: The Profitable Results of Sunshine and Science on the Farm’, *The Sphere*, 27 September 1919, p. 14.

¹⁰⁸ E. Walford Lloyd, ‘Among the Farmers’, *Sussex Agricultural Express*, 23 March 1945, p. 7.

¹⁰⁹ Ford, *It was the Nightingale*, p. 115.

Mr Pound'), drake (named 'Fordie' after Red Ford), and dog disliked being left alone, so when Ford 'went out, [he] was followed by dog, drake and goat—sometimes for great distances.'¹¹⁰ However, here also appears another biblical allusion as the long-awaited sows and 'miraculous' potato indicate a certain faith in the deliverance of agriculture. The public-minded Ford is not just gardening for England, but to be a part of England—to be a part of Edge's porcine paradise. The eventual acquisition of pigs only confirmed Ford's reverence, resting on a chance meeting with his agent Pinker, and the sale of the film rights of *Romance* (1903). On the day in question, Ford had fortuitously refused his habitual sherry and bitters and caught Pinker with ten minutes to spare. Quite suddenly he had funds for the pigs, and for his own plot of land at Cooper's Cottage in Bedham:

So I had my large blacks [...] the two largest [...] and thousands of acres [...] and land of my own for the potatoes [...] and a house that had been old before Columbus had committed his indiscretion.¹¹¹

These pigs were unruly creatures, frequently breaking loose in favour of suitors, leading Ford to chase his 'enamoured and monstrous quadrupeds' up country lanes.¹¹² Despite the inconvenience, this experience also seemed to embed him into local life: 'that county was Sussex', we are told, 'and the emblem of Sussex is a hog and a motto: "Wunt be druv," and those pigs were Sussex, impervious to blows, deaf to objurgations, indifferent, when love filled their bosoms'.¹¹³ To match Meary's pre-war motto of "keep all on going" is another, even more stalwart one to have faith in.¹¹⁴ These animals, obstinately representative of Sussex rural community, appear an apparently set, unchanging force of nature—they literally won't be driven, and consequently might be relied on to provide a landscape of stability even throughout their disruption. By possessing them, as with cultivating towards the disease-

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 104-105.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 117.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 140.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 140.

¹¹⁴ Reading a biographical element into Ford's hope in these creatures, we might even suggest that his admiration for their obstinate natures results partially from his own determination to pursue scandalous love affairs: by this period, first in leaving wife Elsie for Violet Hunt, and then leaving Hunt for Bowen.

free potato, and staking a claim on the local landscape, Ford might also be able to “keep all on going”. Like the cleanliness of germination, the miraculous potato, the supernatural garden, and his labours towards an earthly salvation, these pigs and their rural legacy indicate a quasi-religious faith in the material, in the natural, and the horticultural. For crucially, for Ford, in place of immaterial deities, acts of worship are played out through everyday ritualistic labours. The “winged devils of doubt and destiny” are to be avoided through action: planning, digging and planting; but also having faith in the eventual products of the garden.

Unfortunately, if we are read Ford’s homemaking as an alternative nativity, “birth” never seems to come—despite the eventual acquisition of sows and land and some success with potatoes (despite, even, the birth of Ford and Bowen’s child Esther Julia) the truly “miraculous” never materialises. It was a frustration to again be registered in text. His 1921 poem *A House (A Modern Morality)* again plays out the rituals of the modern poor for Ford’s own situation, as a Fordian farmyard cast squabbles in the background of a young man’s hope for financial deliverance before his son’s birth. Max Saunders rightly highlights Ford’s poem as (yet another) example of domestic nativity, the poem’s self-described “Morality” refers to a call for rural sanctuary to reconstruct the self.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, Ford’s verse has more to say. This is another Fordian pageant, and newly informed by his own real farmyard cast, goats and cats and trees clamour and confuse and compete for attention—and in an update to *The Heart of The Country*’s runaway pony, an old mare escapes to a nearby clover field. For Ford’s poetic counterpart, the end of the war does not mean a pleasant retreat to the green landscapes of old England. Instead, his memory of the trenches pales in comparison to the continued demands of country life. It is the ‘frost, drought and demurrage, / The tiles blown half off the roof’ that are the greatest concern; the dead sows, lost bullocks, and tired hens and cows with no milk that call for ‘four-in-the-morning courage’.¹¹⁶ Despite a letter arriving bringing news of small financial liberation, the poem ends with gloom, as the house

¹¹⁵ Max Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford: A Dual Life, Volume II*, p. 88.

¹¹⁶ Ford Madox Ford, ‘A House’, *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, XVII, March 1921, pp. 291-310 (p. 298).

dictates ‘the circle comes round: / Over and over again’; the house will fall, youths will wear out, ‘your fate shall be the same: / Only the name / Shall alter!’¹¹⁷ The House’s declaration provides a sharp shock, bringing Ford’s poetic counterpoint back to earth despite his good fortune. However, there still remains solace here—solace in the fact that all took part in that endless cycling of renters moving and leaving and dying; all could turn over the earth in the hope to “keep all on going”. Even more explicitly than the rustic cosmogony of *The Heart of the Country, A House* ultimately embeds Ford’s own rural efforts with a wider landscape, stretching both back into history and forward into the future.

Despite Ford’s quasi-mystical “faith” in the deliverance of earth—despite an attempted restoration of self, of brief financial liberation, of an attempted social contribution to agriculture, and his attempt to re-immense himself within “the Heart of the Country”, he ultimately can do no more than be subsumed into that same old pattern—that cycle of life, death, and forgetting. Nevertheless, Ford was not to capitulate fully to the cycle: in 1922, the prospect of an English winter was turning country life to a ‘grim trial’.¹¹⁸ Cooper’s Cottage was given up—the large Blacks sold for bacon prices—as Ford and Bowen prepared to winter in the Mediterranean.¹¹⁹ Ford would never live in England again. He was leaving for a new romance: that of ‘the good Provencal and his Eden-garlic-garden’.¹²⁰ However, whilst he was to leave the literal cultivation of English landscape behind, he remained deeply concerned with its endless cycling. If living in his native country was no longer the solution, he could at least turn his attention to the problem of forgetfulness. In his later reminiscences, this is precisely what he would do: turn to his imagined pageants and his ritualisations of country life, to repeatedly memorialise his time in the Heart of the country in new ways. As always, the country garden was at the centre of his imaginations, but now it was to take on an explicitly literary importance.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 310.

¹¹⁸ Ford in Saunders, Vol II, p. 122.

¹¹⁹ Saunders, Vol II, p. 123.

¹²⁰ Ford, *Provence*, p. 20.

Ford's Gardened Narratives: Fiction and Biography

In Provence, Ford repeatedly returned in text to its English counterpart. His impression now possessed an additional 'patina' of memory and history: of his time spent from the 1890s, and of the relationships he maintained. Separated from the habitual miseries of rural England, he turned to remembering past landscapes less inhibited by their realities. He did not abandon his labouring friends: the over-worked Meary reemerges in *Return to Yesterday* (1931), where Ford repeats her biography. However, his emphasis has changed. Rather than dwelling on the inevitable progression of the field labourer from hard work to death, he emphasises her as an upstanding example of the rural labouring class. Meary was now long gone, and the hop-picking industry that sustained her also suffering, with the interwar hop trade ('the main speciality of Kent and Sussex') hit with decline and instability: between 1914 and 1922, the amount of acreage put to the crop fell from 36,700 to 27,000; and the large beer duty increase left large amounts of hops unsold.¹²¹ Ford's later reminiscence now serves to memorialise both Meary and her dying industry: both falling behind in modern England.

Nevertheless, instead of highlighting workers dying in the workhouse, he summarises the English countryside of the 1890s as offering 'as good a life as the world had to show'.¹²² Such characterisations bleed between his reminiscences and his fiction. The relatively sanitised Old Gunning, 'a heavy elderly peasant', frames *The Last Post* (1928), which begins with Gunning lumbering through knee-high grass to accost war-casualty Mark Tietjens.¹²³ Old Gunning, Ford describes, is 'an all-round man' who 'could bind a tidy thatch and trim a hedge properly'.¹²⁴ The prostrate, post-war Tietjens, on the other hand, 'would never do' anything again.¹²⁵ In their ribald capability, Ford's rural poor now cross further into idealising

¹²¹ *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, VIII, ed. by Joan Thirsk (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p. 189.

¹²² Ford, *Return to Yesterday*, p. 154.

¹²³ Ford Madox Ford, *The Last Post* (New York: The Library Guild of America, 1928), p. 13.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

territory. These are rustic folk to carry him ‘back into touch with an earlier world’: a pre-war world struck off from loss and incapacity.¹²⁶ It was easier, it seems, to lean into the ideal when the reality was no longer so present, and easier too to cast it as a pleasant landscape from which literary movements were born. In his reminiscences, he would work to combine his past rural life with that of literary society in comical (and sometimes melancholy) ways, creating curious remembrances that reimagine and retell history in the present, often threading The Pent and Red Ford together. In these texts, Ford turns from his impressions of a part historical, part modern countryside to one inhabited and interrupted by friends, to memorialise their contribution to modern literature.

In *It was the Nightingale* (1934), the gardened literary history is brought to fruition. Ford revisits his potatoes:

I attached names of friends to each of my potato plants. In consequence, Joseph, when he woke me in the mornings, would dash in with startling pieces of literary information. “Mr ’Enry James have picked up proper in the night, but Mr. Conrad do peck and pine and is yalowin’, Mr. Galsworthy’s beetles ‘ave spread all over Miss Austen”.¹²⁷

Aside from a caprine Ezra Pound, the 1919 Ford is accompanied by friends literally emerging from the earth. In one sense, his remembrance appears a fanciful, literary joke about new vegetal companions. However, by juxtaposing “startling literary information” with the Sussex working-class vernacular of Joseph, his stable-hand, Ford integrates these eminent writers into his post-war daily pursuit for the disease-free potato. Ford’s comical story invites us to consider the validity of his statements—why, we wonder, is it so incongruous to consider Galsworthy as naturalist, novelist, vegetable? There is perhaps nothing incredibly odd about a yellowing Conrad if we take his tale as merely a faithful biography of a

¹²⁶ Ford, *Heart of the Country*, p. 5.

¹²⁷ Ford, *Nightingale*, p. 111.

group of potato plants. After all, once named, the plants become Jameses and Austens in their own right, despite having histories that contextually confuse the tangential histories of their literary namesakes.

The light-hearted incongruity of Ford's literary "information" masks more solemn undertones. At *Nightingale's* completion, each companion had died, except Galsworthy. Ford's potatoes are caught between two periods: that of their original, 1919 naming, and that of their later commemoration. They speak in turn to Ford's 1919 disconnect with pre-war rural Sussex, a 1934 commemoration of digging at Red Ford, and of lost lives and friends. Depending on the period considered, the reader drifts between light-hearted alienation to active mourning of friends departed. Reading his pursuit of the disease-free potato alongside these starchy memorials, we might note his hunt for potato productivity to also signify a biographical quest to let his friends live on. It is a mission repeated throughout his reminiscences. In *Return to Yesterday*, Ford dwells on St. Leonard's Well at Winchelsea, two miles from Rye. Once you drink from these 'dark waters', we are told, 'you will never rest till you drink again'.¹²⁸ Many of Ford's rural companions have done so—not just James and Conrad, but also Crane and Hudson. 'They are all dead now', notes Ford, morbidly, stating their perceived influence upon literature, and repeating Conrad's Impressionistic declaration: 'It is above all to make you see'.¹²⁹ Ford's potato portraits are confirmed as commemoration as well as Impressionism, and his new Impressionist histories ways of reviving his friends in the country garden, as well as confirming their importance to modern literature.

Within Ford's literary critical reminiscence, his Impressionist masters become registered with quasi-miraculous talents. Conrad was of such importance to Ford as to be memorialised in the book-length volume *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance* (1925): he noted that he had 'never known another writer who on the surface was so exactly his books'.¹³⁰ Ford's James had found an England that seemed 'one large deer park across which the sunlight fell upon ubiquitous haunts of ancient peace' in which,

¹²⁸ Ford, *Return to Yesterday*, p. 17

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹³⁰ Ford, *Thus to Revisit*, p. 34.

Ford notes, he planted ‘the seeds of the novel as it presently exists’.¹³¹ ‘[H]is eyes looked you through and through’, Ford wrote, and ‘it was held in Rye that he practiced black magic’.¹³² Crane was lauded as possessing an exceptional economy of expression, but Ford also admired how his interest in history was always grounded in the present: even when stationed in a ‘baronial’ manor on ‘the site of the battle of Hastings’, Crane ‘was thinking how to render the crash of the dray horse’s hooves’.¹³³ Both Hudson and Crane become god-like figures: Crane is taken by Ford ‘at once to be a god—an Apollo with starry eyes’, whilst Hudson’s literary divinity is ‘of a hidden, woodland order’.¹³⁴ Hudson is credited with a simplicity of expression that seemed to render true impression to the extent that Ford cites reading and experiencing Hudson’s *Nature in Downland* (1923) and how its impression of ‘lying on the turf of the high sunlit downs above Lewes’ felt like Ford’s own memory.¹³⁵ It was not the first time Ford had dwelt in text upon Hudson’s Impressionist talent: within ‘On Impressionism’ he had used Hudson as a lesson in the difference between Impressionist and non-Impressionist prose, comparing his treatment of a grass variety to that of the *Times*’ agricultural correspondent: still ‘a jolly good writer’ but one concerned only with the ‘factual observations’ of ‘as many as possible other sound authorities’.¹³⁶ Ford notes that one can learn much from the *Times* correspondent (the number of blades per acre, for example, or expected tonnages and nitrogenous values) but that Hudson gives ‘nothing but the pleasure of coming into contact with his temperament’—perhaps not even the ability to recognise the plant being described in the wild.¹³⁷ Hudson’s value was almost infinitely different, but nevertheless giant: elsewhere, Ford would quote Conrad’s determination that Hudson’s ‘words are just there, under your eyes; just as the good God makes

¹³¹ Ford Madox Ford, ‘Techniques’, in *Critical Writings*, ed. by Frank MacShane (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), pp. 56-71 (p. 61).

¹³² Ford, *Thus to Revisit*, p. 48.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 66; Ford Madox Ford, ‘Stephen Crane’, *The American Mercury*, January 1936, pp. 36-45 (p. 39; p. 45).

¹³⁴ Ford, ‘Stephen Crane’, p. 36.

¹³⁵ Ford Madox Ford, ‘W. H. Hudson’, *The American Mercury*, March 1936, pp. 306-317 (p. 311).

¹³⁶ Ford, ‘On Impressionism’, pp. 34-35.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

the grass to grow'.¹³⁸ So faithful did Hudson's text feel to actual impression, that it seemed to be just as natural as the thing itself: indeed, Hudson seemed able to bring life into being.

Much like the quasi-mystic possibilities of the earth, Ford's reminiscences also signal this development of a new modern literature to be sustained by the English countryside. *Return to Yesterday* concentrates on meetings with these favoured figures, frequently in and amongst the garden. In one episode, Crane appears at Grace Cottage in Limpsfield to plant a rose tree. As expected, Ford was at that time engrossed in potatoes (on this instance studying their effect on thistle eradication, and unsuccessfully planning writings on the subject for literary journals). Ford assures us that 'as a writer of books [Crane] was incomparable and the Limpsfield tree that he planted is alive at this day to testify to his handiwork'.¹³⁹ The tree's continued life span might indeed testify to his gardening ability. By association, however, Ford also suggests that the tree demonstrates his proficiency as a writer in a Georgic conflation of literary and horticultural ability. Ford's narrative was repeated again in *The American Mercury* (1936), where he writes that Crane had been encouraged to plant the rose in the confidence 'that it would rival eventually, in fame, Shakespeare's mulberry tree and the laurels of Dante'.¹⁴⁰ It makes another form of commemoration, but also signals to canonisation—the memorial planting of Crane's laurel should also be read as the institution of a new canon of English literary greats; and a way of reinterpreting the historic Georgic tradition of literary gardeners for a new age, based in the pre-war rural English landscape. Such confluences are rife within Ford's texts, and they too should be considered as reworkings of this tradition. *It Was the Nightingale* contains perhaps the most—the laying of hedges is interspersed with poetry prizes—and Ford notes that gardening, apparently the only intelligent rural occupation, 'is an art'.¹⁴¹ Simultaneously, his gardens become a metaphor for artistic progression: 'one's art', he declares elsewhere, 'is a small enclosed garden within whose high walls one

¹³⁸ Ford Madox Ford, 'Notes for A Lecture on Vers Libre', in *Critical Writings*, ed. by Frank MacShane (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), pp. 155-162 (p. 158).

¹³⁹ Ford, *Return to Yesterday*, p. 49.

¹⁴⁰ Ford, 'Stephen Crane', p. 36.

¹⁴¹ Ford, *Nightingale*, p. 113.

moves administering certain manures and certain treatments in order to get certain effects'.¹⁴² Even the horizontal Mark Tietjens muses such in *The Last Post*, considering that Shakespeare, like Old Gunning, was an 'All-round man in a way too', probably 'very likely' to know 'how to hedge' or thatch.¹⁴³

These Georgic twinings of literary and rural efforts also inform Ford's repeated casting of friends as parts of his landscapes, whether actual, animal, or vegetal. As well as his potato-plants and Pound the goat, James has the misfortune to be characterised as an immense 'Sacky Toad' burgling Ford's marrow frame. All demonstrate further amusing instances of new, alternative biographies that keep friends close by and create yet more layers of association and memory.¹⁴⁴ And in another, particularly pertinent example, Ford recounts an early encounter with Conrad. Ford is dressed untidily to work on the house, and is mistaken by Conrad for the gardener. Considering the importance of the faithful impression to the making of Fordian histories, his anecdote makes an important case for Ford to also be included in his new Impressionist canon, brought into being by Conrad's misapprehension.

Such misapprehensions begin to take on a crucial part in Ford's reminiscences of rural-literary life. Ford's first meeting with Conrad appears much like their first meeting with Hudson, detailed in *Thus to Revisit* (1921). The text is mostly concerned with contemporary literary history, but as always, the Heart of the Country is never far away. This episode bases Ford and Conrad at work in The Pent's parlour. Conrad is again the mis-apprehender, whilst the young Ford looks on nervously. 'A man went past the window: very tall, casting a shadow across the pink monthly roses'.¹⁴⁵ The 'commonplace Kentish' roses appear strangely prevalent: as he continues, 'it is disturbing when you, a man of letters, engrossed in the Heart of the Country, see a shadow fall from a very tall stranger across [...] the monthly roses'.¹⁴⁶ Ford's immediate thought is for bailiffs, but instead the following exchange occurs:

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 127.

¹⁴³ Ford, *The Last Post*, (New York: The Library Guild of America), p. 16.

¹⁴⁴ Ford in Saunders, *A Dual Life: Volume II*, p. 67.

¹⁴⁵ Ford Madox Ford, *Thus to Revisit* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1921), p. 72.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 72.

Conrad: You've come about the mare!
Voice: I'm Hudson!
Conrad: She's out with the ladies.
Voice: I'm Hudson!
Conrad: The mare will be back in about half-an-hour [. . .] ¹⁴⁷

The characters of Voice and Conrad are dramatised, yet to unite, and the meeting of another writer obscured by rural occupation. Ford offers us no resolution, with the reader left to imagine *ad infimum* confusion: in leaving the episode unresolved, he begins another fictive biography, opening up an alternative time-line where Hudson is indeed 'the man who wants to buy a horse'.¹⁴⁸ Ford adds more layers of impression to his conception of the countryside: further 'films of dust' and 'makings of histories'.¹⁴⁹ Interruption, confusion, and interpretational accidents thus become central to Ford's working out of the Heart of the Country, beginning new quasi-biographical narratives that let his friends live on. These new narratives are testament both to Ford's intention to embed his histories in the English landscape, and to the imaginative powers of the Impressionist Greats.

Considering the importance of misidentification to Impressionist imagination, Crane's rose-planting comes to take on additional importance—itself another muddled act, as Crane had himself mis-appended Ford's rough-hewn, fortnight-old Limpsfield cottage as a 'bully baronial ruin'.¹⁵⁰ As Ford notes, 'he put in, I remember, a rose tree beside the immensely thick, oaken front door—for all the world like a king planting a memorial oak!'¹⁵¹ The rose's purpose seems to be to accredit or remember an imagined history of the Limpsfield cottage, despite its status as new-build. There appears an intriguing discord between Crane, consummate tree-planter and writer, and Crane the historian, leading us to again question the necessity of accurate identification in the Fordian garden history. Crane's commemoration of Grace

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 72.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 72.

¹⁴⁹ Ford, *The Heart of the Country*, p. 212.

¹⁵⁰ Ford, *Return to Yesterday*, p. 37.

¹⁵¹ Ford, *Thus to Revisit*, p. 106.

Cottage as historical does not hamper his textual and imaginative ability. As Ford assures us, the rose tree is testament to Crane's literary proficiency, despite, or perhaps even because of his misapprehension. Crane's memorial planting imposes a legitimate, imaginative history grounded securely in Ford's present, just as his ducks are roasted alongside Garnett's aunts, and an amphibian Henry James squats in the gloom of his post-war garden. Ford's rural characters are firmly within Impressionistic tradition; his remembrances of Fordian country a way to bring that idyll finally, and legitimately, into being, and to prevent it from passing into forgetting. By allowing the generation of new and strange possible landscapes, Ford's misidentifications provide alternative biographies that toe a strange line between fact and fiction, actively relying on fancy being perceived as truth. Aside from the possibility of land, Ford's friends are revered figures because of their ability to bring such imaginative truths to being, and Ford's biographies take on elements of hagiography: chronicling the everyday miracles of literary greats (imagined and actual), filtered through the country garden. Considered thus, the numinous qualities of Ford's cottage gardens are in part pinned down—that possibility of something more, the miraculous, that hope for spiritual succour—all take their supernatural qualities from Fordian literary imagination. The monthly rose, creeping across the background of Ford's texts, indicates that for Ford, the heart of the country is made up from a (imaginary) Sussex country garden, from which friends stride about, and histories are brought into being.

There is safety in the ritualisation of community, and in the continued iteration of tradition, even if the tradition includes predictable ills. Ford admires the Sussex acceptance of this, and their battle cry "Wunt be druv", trying to take it for his own, with varying levels of success. He performs his own repetitions both materially and in-text, moving first from cottage to cottage around The Pent, and then later from Red Ford, to Cooper's Cottage, and then, despite recent good fortune, away for good. He creates his own literary ritualisations too—iterating communal gatherings and dramatising casts of friends, family and farm-animals that are repeated continually throughout his texts. His recognition of the commemoration implicit in disseminating acts like the rural auction also defines his biographical

tendencies. As Conrad, James, Crane and Hudson wander through his texts, repeating anecdotes in sometimes similar and sometimes different ways, their lives are repeatedly disseminated in new forms and permutations.

4 | Pastoral Persuasion and the Faux Naïve: Composing Carrington Country

From the 1980 publication of *Carrington: Drawings, Paintings and Decorations*, critical effort has aimed to redress a historical perception of the painter Dora Carrington as little more than Lytton Strachey's 'housekeeper or cook'—'as a country hoyden occupied in setting ducks' eggs under broody hens'.¹ Carrington rarely exhibited, and beyond her Slade education (1910-1914) was not especially aligned with any artistic school. However, she was an evocative correspondent and prolific maker and painter of a range of portraits, landscapes, and still lifes. She worked with Fry at the Omega Workshops; overhauled the interiors and gardens at the two houses she shared in the Home Counties with Strachey at Tidmarsh Mill (1917-1924) and Ham Spray until her 1932 suicide; and engaged in mural painting and with the design of decorative objects like glass and foil pictures, woodcuts and pub signs. From her later Slade years, she was also progressively pulled towards the representation of rural landscapes, aestheticising her working artist's relationship with the land in her painted works and across her intimate correspondence. In the fifteen years spent at Tidmarsh and Ham Spray, such aestheticisations were turned towards the construction of a liveable pastoral idyll: a chance to compose an alternative approach to companionable domesticity. As this chapter examines, reading Carrington's correspondence alongside her garden-making and her visual invocations of working rural life reveals a richly referenced narrative that imagines a modern poetic repose able to accommodate queer companionship. Nevertheless, devoted to the private maintenance of more intimate relationships rather than the public circulation of works, Carrington's efforts had the unfortunate effect of opening her up to persisting interpretations of provinciality. This reputation was encouraged by her secrecy with regards to her painting, and her gossip-provoking private life: a reputation that misreads Carrington's quasi-naïve studied engagements with rustic and classical landscapes.

¹ Noel Carrington, *Carrington: Drawings, Paintings and Decorations* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1980); Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina, *Carrington: A Life* (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995), p. 134.

From her intimate relationships with men and women, her extended companionship with the homosexual Lytton, her romantic pursual by Mark Gertler and John Nash, and her position in various love triangles (with painters Gertler and Richard Nevinson at the Slade, with Gertler and Strachey, and later-husband Ralph Partridge and writer Gerald Brenan, amongst others), Carrington was reworked into a number of novels, with variously unflattering results.² Her relationships were of fascination to Bloomsbury, and she appeared to her contemporaries somewhat ‘quaint’ in appearance.³ However, Carrington was far more than the affected ‘countrified schoolgirl’ stereotype constructed by her literary (mis)representations. She entered the Slade at a pivotal moment David Boyd Haycock would later categorise as the school’s ‘crisis of brilliance’—her first term coinciding with Fry’s *Manet and the Post-Impressionists*.⁴ She was at the fringe of the Bloomsburies and amongst Ottoline Morell’s Garsington Manor throng; friends, initially, with both Nash brothers; especially familiar, later on, with the circle surrounding Augustus John. She had also been close to such Slade names as Stanley Spencer, the aforementioned Nevinson, and the wider 1911 Slade ‘Neo-Primitives’.⁵ The group shared, as Ysanne Holt summarises, ‘an aversion to Impressionism, renouncing all desire simply to register the fleeting moment’, ‘an unconventional handling of space’, decorative tendencies, ‘the naïve simplicity of Piero della Francesca and Giotto’; Blake, and elements of Pre-Raphaelitism.⁶ All were also significant influences on Carrington’s work. Nevertheless, describing her practice to Brenan in 1921, she categorised herself ‘a simple painter’ with ‘more feeling’ for ‘signboards & very simple 18th century English Painting than for Modern French’.⁷

² Including D. H. Lawrence’s *Women in Love*, Aldous Huxley’s *Crome Yellow*, Gilbert Cannan’s *Mendel*, and Wyndham Lewis’ *The Apes of God*; see Gerzina, *Carrington*, p. xvii.

³ Paul Nash in Gerzina, *Carrington*, p. 26. For commentary on Carrington’s various love triangles in the Bloomsbury context, see Regina Marler, ‘The Bloomsbury Love Triangle’, in *Queer Bloomsbury*, ed. by Brenda Helt and Madelyn Detloff (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp. 135-151

⁴ David Boyd Haycock, *A Crisis of Brilliance: Five Young British Artists and the Great War* (London: Old Street Publishing, 2010).

⁵ The group also including Gertler and Spencer. For an account of Carrington within these circles, see Gerzina, *Carrington*; Boyd Haycock; Ysanne Holt, *British Artists and the Modernist Landscape* (London: Routledge, 2003),

⁶ Holt, p. 131.

⁷ Carrington to Gerald Brenan, in *Carrington’s Letters*, ed. Anne Chisholm (London: Vintage, 2017), p. 172.

This identified simplicity, borne out in the naïve style of her paintings and personal correspondence, belies on its surface the complex narratives and references that went into composing a companionable Carrington country. For this country, emanating from the gardens of Tidmarsh and Ham Spray, cultivated a liveable pastoral idyll. As I argue, Carrington's gardened narratives offer a way to reframe her provincial misrepresentations, but also provide an essential perspective from which to reappraise the developments of her art within the context of her private life and gardens. These were gardens of repose: gardens that offered a retreat from the horrors of war, the sniping cosmopolitan cultures surrounding Bloomsbury, from the difficult expectations of family, and from prying eyes who might disrupt queer companionship. Nevertheless, Carrington Country was by no means homogeneously composed, but was rather an imaginative landscape of shifting forms, features, and fears. As I demonstrate, this countryside began with an attention to more agricultural rustic landscapes peopled with ruddy peasants and kitchen garden fecundity. However, not far from these more cheerful landscapes lay wilder and more uncultivated spaces. These wilder places were a mostly private counterpoint to the lively rustic spaces to be shared with Strachey, and became increasingly emblematic of her inability to truly connect, and of her contradictory need for independence. For her life, as her biographer Gretchen Gerzina summarises, was a 'series of unresolved, opposing tensions'.⁸ Her string of unsuccessful relationships, and deep discomfort with her female form contributed especially to increased personal turbulence—Carrington felt herself to be 'a hybrid monster', a characterisation only deepened by the realisation of her sapphism. A progressive turn to literary and art history, and in particular, to the cultural traditions of pastoral, which emphasised amorous games and rustic disguise, allowed her to cultivate rural places in which to be something other than she was, and in which queer relationships could be hidden in plain sight. These too, however, had to be placed in the context of those more desolate, solitary spaces:

⁸ Gerzina, *Carrington*, p. xvi.

frequently, Carrington found the demands of her productive landscapes to interfere with her love for wilder landscapes.

I build on recent scholarship aiming to reappraise Carrington's relevance to modern art history, and in particular, scholarship that registers the personality of her attention to place. Jane Hill notes succinctly that her landscape paintings should be considered not as pure landscape but rather 'place portraits': they reveal more about the painter than any real place.⁹ Elise L. Smith has similarly suggested that Carrington's homes and gardens offered an attempt at situating herself with security. Her emotional painted landscapes, Smith argues, present a way of 'stamping her presence' on English countryside, providing order to turbulence.¹⁰ Likewise, Maria Tamboukou has considered the autobiographical importance of her domestic spaces, pinpointing both her constantly frustrated 'will to solitude', as well as her tendency to redesign the interiors of loved ones to gift them personalised spaces representative of her appreciation (colour, Tamboukou argues, was the means by which she attempted to 'intervene in the forms of her life and reinvent herself as' an art object).¹¹ Carrington's complicated personal life has contributed to progressive readings within queer contexts: her original biographer, Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina, has recently drawn on the expanded collections of Carrington's letters to provide a 'nuanced understanding' of Carrington's shifting sexuality which she reads as indicating that she belongs within Christopher Reed's definition of Bloomsbury 'queer subculture'.¹² Reed characterises a campy, 'queer epistolary' style, and a shared determination towards non-normative sexual and social relations he

⁹ Hill, p. 28.

¹⁰ Elise L. Smith, 'Carrington's Phantom Geography and the "Crisis" of her Landscapes', in *'Disciples of Flora': Gardens in History and Culture*, ed. Victoria Emma Pagán, Judith W. Page and Brigitte Weltman-Aron (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2015), pp. 32-50 (p. 33); see also the revised chapter in Page and Smith's *Women, Literature and the Arts of the Countryside of Early Twentieth-Century England* (2021).

¹¹ Maria Tamboukou, *In the Fold between Power and Desire: Women Artists' Narratives* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), p. 132; p. 135.

¹² Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina, "'[T]here were so many things I wanted to do & didn't": The Queer Potential of Carrington's Life and Art', in *Queer Bloomsbury*, ed. by Brenda Helt and Madelyn Detloff (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp. 189-209 (p. 189; p. 190); Christopher Reed, 'Bloomsbury as Queer Subculture', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Bloomsbury Group*, ed. by Victoria Rosner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 71-89 (p. 75);

positions in tandem with Michael Warner's *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (1998).¹³ Both are apt descriptions of Carrington: as is Gerzina's reading of Reed's definition of 'queer epistolary style', which she paraphrases as expressing 'humour, flirtation, self-depreciation, innuendo and irony' in the exploration of new, countercultural ways of being.¹⁴

Whilst Gerzina's essay provides a necessary recognition of the queer literary value of Carrington's own contributions to Bloomsbury's epistolary cultures, its predominately biographical emphasis precludes a close, literary critical interpretation of Carrington's textual style. More recently, Rebecca Birrell has developed upon the reciprocal nature of Carrington's correspondence and her art-making, centring on her still lives: here, her letters are 'sites of artistic experiment' and 'powerful mediums of fantasy' Birrell also reads in tandem with classic queer theory.¹⁵ In this instance, it is Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's definition that rings true for Bloomsbury domestic politics: that of queer being an 'open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning' when gender or sexuality 'aren't made (or can't be made) to signal monolithically'.¹⁶ Here too Birrell finds an apt way of approaching Carrington's approach to finding meaning—and indeed, Kosofsky Sedgwick's use of union of polarised qualities possesses an uncanny congruence with Carrington's often combative pulls in life and work, towards privacy and solitude, and of her yearning for sustained, intimate companionship.¹⁷ However, and whilst it is essential to register the queer contexts of her life and work (especially as they contribute to her and Strachey's interpretations of pastoral tradition), pinning down Carrington's queerness is not the defining point of this argument, but rather a context that enlightens and can be enlightened in turn through the close study of her correspondence, painting, and gardening.

¹³ p. 86).

¹⁴ Gerzina, "“There were so many things”", p. 190.

¹⁵ Rebecca Birrell, *This Dark Country: Women Artists, Still Life and Intimacy in the Early Twentieth-Century* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), p. 18.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Queer and Now', in *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), pp. 1-22 (p. 8).

¹⁷ See also Tamboukou, who has also noted the importance of these two pulls to Carrington's life and work.

Carrington's gardens are queer landscapes, but they are richly referenced, combative and dissonant spaces both with and without their "queerness" in the picture.

This "dissonance" can be therefore read throughout Carrington country, and particularly in those combative pulls between independence and companionship. As I demonstrate, her personal taste for wilder expanses progressively emerges most in her private imaginings, whereas her correspondence works hard to people her landscape for her companions. As in my previous chapters, the garden plays a predominant role in her attempts at self-placing; likewise, an imaginative response to literary and art history permits her to narrate an ideal landscape with its own imposed lineage. This landscape is again one founded in fantasy: so much so that the war does not permeate into her imaginings, despite the fact that all three of her brothers immediately enlisted, with the eldest never making it back. Her closest companions, including Gertler and Strachey, were pacifists and devoted to their aesthetic causes—Carrington had been told by Gertler that 'the best way [they] could help [was] to paint', and to continue to dedicate their lives to the service of art.¹⁸ In addition, Carrington's ideal English countryside differs in her intention towards privacy, and her lack of interest in posterity. She generally declined to date (or even sign) her paintings post Slade, and painted over unsatisfactory compositions. Correspondingly, Carrington Country makes no wider argument about what English landscape should look like, beyond what is to be shared with her companions. It is an insular countryside, dedicated to her life and art. Consequently, her recourse to cultural history can be read to materialise a differently held garden idyll: one less interested in historical justifications for present cultivations, but rather looking to make something alternative and new.

¹⁸ Gertler, in Boyd Haycock, p. 196.

In Search of the Pastoral Escape: Carrington's Early Correspondence

Prior to the 1917 move to Tidmarsh, Carrington's initial cultivation of pastoral attitudes appears within her letters. Her correspondents at the Slade and during the early years of the Great War included Gertler, both Nash brothers, and Christine Kühenthal, before the 1915 inclusion of Strachey, as she navigated a network of artistic companionships. Her letters are highly descriptive, visually as well as textually illustrative—and often erratically punctuated. Her most evocative letters describe new rural sights for close companions: rivers flow blue flanked by historic mills and 'stiff marsh marigolds'; landscapes are composed of naively expressed movement and vivid colour.¹⁹ In 1912, The rural Chilterns as described to John Nash possessed 'green fields like lettuces, you could almost eat them they are so luscious. And black sheep making patterns on the green fields, and amazing little deer which leap together on the hill like a psalm'.²⁰ Carrington would 'trudge home wearily over the field' (she was engaged on a fresco composition at the nearby Brownlow Hall) 'with the black sheep and the woods on the slope, and the little deer and the big deer hopping and running'.²¹

As is typical of her early letters, her unsophisticated expression is matched by a progressively excited rhythm which simplistically visualises a busily productive landscape: full stops cannot sever fully one sentence from another, with many new observations marked by an introductory "and". Later in the evening sees another typical shift in focus to shape and colour: 'dark, dead grey clouds' go 'clump clump across the sky'—another simplistically playful description pushing the landscape into quick, monosyllabic repetitions of sounds and alliterative movements. Skies are perceived ekphrastically as if they are already painted compositions: one view, Carrington evokes, is 'a long-shaped upright panel with

¹⁹ Carrington to John Nash, in Ronald Blythe, *First Friends: Paul and Bunty, John and Christine – and Carrington* (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 23.

²⁰ Carrington to John Nash, in Blythe, p. 35.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

a moon on a sky glazed with many colours'.²² And Carrington's letter landscapes were also concerned with the possibilities of the productive rural plot. 'Even at night', she rhapsodised to John in 1914, 'I see apples in my dreams & all day long I pick & eat them & realise the many resources of an apple. ie apple charlotte, apple stewed, A baked, A boiled, A turnover'.²³ Carrington's rushed, clumsily punctuated list offers an authentic introduction to her naïvely performed attitudes towards landscape, to her propensity to transform it, and to share her transformations with her companions.

Carrington's letters express her concern with finding and cultivating a rural escape—one, that, most crucially, she hopes to share with loved ones. Throughout her early correspondence, we can read her writing about landscape as imagining a rural countryside that is, like her meditation upon the possibilities of an apple, and like her vision of sky-as-painted-composition, similarly transformed. In order to later demonstrate how Carrington's intimate "transformations" of landscape were as prevalent in her textual correspondence as her (similarly private) paintings, I first examine her correspondence with Christine Kühnlenthal and Lytton Strachey. The written description of landscape was essential to Carrington's idealisation of the companionable country escape. Such a mediating focus permits a study into her complementarily textual and visual imaginations of shared landscapes and gardens. As I later discuss, her naïve written descriptions of the appearance of landscape provide an alternative way of situating the deceptively simplistic forms of her landscape paintings. Both can be read as complimentary materialisations of an ideal Carrington country, and both made up essential ways of sharing her vision for an ideal country with her loved ones. However, to unpick the full breadth of Carrington's cross-medium attention to the countryside, I first examine how such written landscapes present her need for an escape from limiting family dynamics, and her need for genuine, alternatively figured companionship. This companionship required a base—a garden within which to retreat—and transform.

²² Ibid., p. 36.

²³ Carrington to John Nash, in Chisholm, p. 13.

In 1915, Carrington's family moved to Ibthorpe House, Huntsbourne Tarrant, in Hampshire. Having left the Slade the previous year, Ibthorpe provided Carrington with her first prolonged domestic connection with rural landscape, albeit not an entirely content one. She had declared her upbringing unhappy, and felt isolated living with family when her beloved brothers were stationed at the front. She venerated her father, who was by this point essentially bedbound, and hated her mother, who she judged as conservative, overbearing, and entirely without taste ('Mother has no ideas except rotten ones', she determined about her decorative plans).²⁴ The Slade had offered new aesthetic and domestic freedoms which were now supplanted, but she was now able to further turn to rustic England. Her epistolary writings about (now lost) painting from the period reflect this engagement: as Gerzina reproduces, there were still lives of apples and pumpkins in yellows and greens and oranges; 'bronzed' ploughboys and overfull haycarts; and a garden view of 'a huge clipped yew tree, & figures underneath gardening'.²⁵ Whilst we are now unable to comment on these works with any specificity, it can be determined that they were not intended to simply reproduce the typical themes of Edwardian landscape painting. Instead, they were Carrington's own interpretation of rural England, informed by the aesthetics of Slade contemporaries. As I shortly discuss, whilst the landscapes of Slade alumni might have been imaginatively informed by similar rural scenes as the Victorian and Edwardian garden painters, they sought to distinguish their responses.

Carrington had firmly positioned herself against the local Huntsbourne artists who included Anna Lea Merritt, the pre-Raphaelite-inspired painter of the 1890 *Love Locked Out*—this circle, she gloomily concluded, were composed from 'terrible women who go to Cornwall to sketch & think everything "charming & so soft"'. Merritt had even referred to previous Slade talent (and significant influence to Carrington) Augustus John as 'disgusting John', she reported to Gertler.²⁶ Carrington might also have

²⁴ Carrington to Gertler, in Gerzina, *Carrington*, p. 58.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.

been drawn to gardens and rural topographies, but she would not choose to closely render such blooming herbaceous borders as Merritt's 1909 *A Garden In Spring*—or even such resplendent scenes as reproduced in the 1908 volume *An Artist's Garden*, which, as the subtitle ran, was 'Tended, Painted & Described by Anna Lea Merritt'.²⁷ Whilst Elliott writes that Merritt's garden views included a certain kind of "misty" atmospheric effect that puts her painting more in line with Waterhouse than garden watercolourists like Elgood, the volume nevertheless contributed to the aims of the Jekyll and Allingham school of garden picturing.²⁸ Merritt's introduction reproduces her intention towards capturing and preserving lasting garden schemes: 'I have not', she wrote, 'acquired the latest impressionist style, which so ably represents things as seen from a motor-car at full speed. I have been obliged to sit out for many hours daily in freezing wind, and later in burning sun, looking long and carefully at flower and leaf'.²⁹ Carrington's, as I later discuss, matched instead her faux-naïve, imaginative written style, and were much informed by her Slade compatriots and the Neo-Primitives.

In flight from such affronts to taste and freedom, Carrington turned to the outdoors. She wandered the Inkpen hills at will, began gardening in earnest and set up a small outhouse studio for painting. Such exploits are frequently narrated in her intimate correspondence. One such recipient was Kühenthal—a close Slade companion. In 1918, Kühenthal would marry John Nash, after his romantic interest in Carrington had waned and shortly before his departure for France and the front line: he and Kühenthal had become lovers eighteen months prior. The union of Kühenthal and Nash was the beginning of the end for Carrington's companionable interest in both. However, in 1915, Carrington's correspondence to Kühenthal abounds with suggestive attempts to tempt her friend to join her in a rural escape. One letter—written Valentine's Day 1915—lays out her landscaping to her correspondent. 'Our

²⁷ Anna Lea Merritt, *An Artist's Garden: Tended, Painted & Described by Anna Lea Merritt* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1908).

²⁸ Brent Elliott, 'Gardens Illustrated', in *Art of the Garden: The Garden in British Art, 1800 to the Present Day*, ed. by Nicholas Alfrey, Stephen Daniels and Martin Postle (London: Tate Publishing) pp. 40-47 (p. 45).

²⁹ Merritt, pp. ix-x.

garden will be great', she announces: 'lovely yew hedges very thick, & then green mossy grass. Behind my studio I am making a wild garden, all grass and wild plants, under the tall fir trees'.³⁰ It was the first hint of the naturalist gardening style to be employed at Tidmarsh two years hence, and certainly not a Merritt scheme. She then ranges the surrounding hills, writing a love letter to Huntsbourne. Two hares wrestle 'hind legs, twisting & turning' in a tale of persuasion ('it really was the tragedy of the over-ardent suitor and the reluctant lady hare', Carrington quips, suggestively); and she jumps between early spring sights and hopes, wishing to be able to lay the hedges and hurdles seen encasing black lambs at pasture.³¹

In her slyly passionate imagery she twins the vitality of productive rural life with sexual suggestion in a way Williams had read as typical to the period's modern rural writing, interpreting figures like D. H. Lawrence and many Georgian Poets as merging agricultural and sexual imagery in their attempted turn towards an authentically felt rural existence rooted in English landscape.³² Lawrence and the Georgians were familiar to the ex-Slade circle. Lawrence had been included in editor Edward Marsh's 1912 *Georgian Poetry*: a volume announcing a new modern poetry aimed at a newly authentic way of writing. As Robert H. Ross' landmark study has suggested, for poets at the beginning of the 1910s, 'in the modern world the quaint Romantic notion of straining after infinity was only—in Harold Monro's phrase—"harmlessly ridiculous"', and poetry needed to 'deal with thing itself'.³³ For the Georgians this often meant rural-sexual twinning and a turn towards a colloquial simplicity found in the rural working class and in other "rustic" stock-figures that could be seen as living apart from the modern world, including gypsies and tramps: figures also of great importance to Carrington, who was particularly

³⁰ Carrington to Kühnenthal, in Chisholm, p. 15.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

³² Williams, pp. 361-362.

³³ Robert H. Ross, *The Georgian Revolt, 1910-1922: Rise and Fall of a Poetic Ideal* (Carbondale: South Illinois University Press, 1965), p. 17; p. 18.

enamoured with the poetry of W. H. Davies, tramp turned popular poet (and included in Marsh's *Georgian* volumes).³⁴

The connection between the themes of the ex-Slade painters and Marsh's conception of modern poetry was further established when Marsh began to collect the works of Duncan Grant and Paul Nash, and to patronise Gertler—a connection cemented in Marsh's unfulfilled aims for a companion volume of *Georgian Painters*, ultimately shelved at the outbreak of war.³⁵ Lawrence became a particular friend of Gertler (both shared, Boyd Haycock writes, an intense, idealistic and emotional nihilism, as well as a fervent pacificism); and was, like most of Bloomsbury, deeply interested in his relationship with Carrington.³⁶ Whilst Carrington wrote to Gertler in 1915 that she had loved Lawrence's 1913 *Sons and Lovers* 'so much that I want to know of him' (one could wager that she was fascinated by the novel's intense approach to the isolating and all-consuming pulls of family and private passion), she would quickly tire of his personality and insistence on his personal genius, which did not mesh well with her more self-deprecating appraisals of her own work.³⁷ And such metaphors were by no means only the province of the writers. Holt has recently read Williams' 'rural-sexual metaphor' in the work of Carrington's wider Slade Circle, like Stanley Spencer's sensual and muscular *The Apple Gatherers* (1912-1913) and Paul Nash's *A Vision at Evening* (1911); and as I later discuss, Carrington's own works at Tidmarsh were imbued with sexual suggestion.³⁸ However, we should also read Carrington's early use of such metaphor as also based within her progressive interest in early-modern and eighteenth-century

³⁴ For a survey of this particular modern trend, see Margaret Crowther, 'The Tramp', in *Myths of the English*, ed. by Roy Porter (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), pp. 90-112. Such was the power of the ideal of the rural vagrant, that Douglas Goldring's literary modernist magazine *The Tramp* would be titled in his honour: see Helen Southworth's 'Douglas Goldring's *The Tramp: An Open Air Magazine* (1910-1911) and Modernist Geographies', *Literature and History*, 18 (2009), 35-53.

³⁵ Boyd Haycock, p. 195.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

³⁷ Carrington to Gertler in Chisholm, p. 17; see also Gerzina, *Carrington*, p. 61.

³⁸ Williams, p. 363; Holt, p. 141.

pastoral mechanics. As her relationship with Lytton deepened, Carrington was to increasingly engage with a different kind of faux-simplicity: one to be found in amorous games of rustic disguise.

Carrington's Valentine's Day letter had begun on a different note: responding to Kühenthal's previous suggestion of a holiday with an appeal of her own. 'Yes, yes, I will come and live in a cottage', she writes, 'only do let us keep it a secret. Let us pretend we might not go. Like a "liaison" in a book, we will stay a week in a cottage'.³⁹ She continues to suggest a bleakly picturesque property befitting such a scheme, enquiring whether Kühenthal would 'be frightened to sleep in an empty ruined cottage in a wonderful bleak mountainous valley near here', moving to note its specifications:

I discovered it by accident the other Wednesday when I was on a walk about 9 miles from here. It was all in ruins except for two rooms; & it was quite alone on the side of a big bare hill.

Christine, be brave and live with me there. Nobody would ever see us or discover us [...] Even if the remaining roof falls in on us, we shall at least die together!⁴⁰

Carrington takes pleasure in the potential illicitness of her secretive plan. This derelict cottage is the site for hidden games—implicit courtship, even—and her glorification of the unprepossessingly picturesque ruins transforms it into a poetic locale. This was not a quaint, habitable cottage primed for a cosy stay, but a neglected site, apparently barren and uncultivated: as such, it returns to an earlier picturesque more explicitly inhabited by ruin and ruggedness than was being gardened and painted by Jekyll and co. Her proposal also offers an intriguing introduction that other, more solitary landscape distinct from the bright and cheerful agricultural fieldscapes often narrated to companions: to that wilder, bleaker landscape emblematic of her private imaginings.

³⁹ Carrington to Kühenthal in Chisholm, p. 15.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

Read alongside her determination to share her landscape with Christine, first through the letter, and second in (a hoped-for) personal “liaison”, Carrington’s Valentine’s Day letter situates a landscape evocatively to suggest it as a site for possible companionship. Reverberating through her letter is that twinning of intimate companionship (and what would later develop into a more explicit amorousness) with gardening and country work, ranging over in a fruitful countryside populated by new-born lambs and duelling hares, and shadowy dwellings fit for disguise. Whilst Carrington was yet to fully realise her sapphic inclinations, her letter to Kühenthal demonstrates her recognition of the possibilities of alternative—queer—forms of companionship within rural landscape. It offers another indication of how for Carrington, naïve “simplicity” belied greater depths, and introduces that she had recognised how she might both signal to and obfuscate her attempts at courtship through rustic and pastoral imagery.

Soon Carrington was attempting to entice Strachey ‘away to the Inkpen hills’, and in particular, to Combe.⁴¹ The manor house at Old Combe was another half-ruined and empty property that Carrington had happened upon in her wanderings, in this case possessing ‘a deserted garden’ for sitting in.⁴² Combe Manor held such a pull that it featured elsewhere in her correspondence, described to Kühenthal as a house dreamed ‘of all day’—Carrington lived ‘in constant terror lest someone should take it’.⁴³ However, she was not able to tempt Strachey, and on the 19th of June 1916, disaster struck. Combe House had been taken at last, and was under repair.

You can imagine what this meant. Taken! By whom? What repairs? At last I managed to escape and rushed away on my bicycle to The House. What repairs! But it had to be. The grass was all cut in the garden. The orchard pruned, walls mended, and neat. Little violas with pert yellow faces and geraniums sniggered round the foot of the house in newly made beds. Think! Violas, in such a garden!⁴⁴

⁴¹ Carrington to Lytton Strachey, in Chisholm, p. 39.

⁴² Carrington to Kühenthal, in Chisholm, p. 16.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁴⁴ Carrington to Lytton Strachey, in Chisholm, p. 41.

There are several horrors on display in Carrington's characteristically vivid letter. She could not possess Combe House; she could not spend time in the (no-longer) unruly orchard: all "wildness" and all bleak rusticity was now neatened. The plot was newly cultivated, and newly closed-off from the Inkpen landscape: and in a manner deemed particularly inappropriate to her characterisation of place. Robbed of her usual lengthier sentence structure in favour of repeated, staccato exclamations, her prose registers (and poeticises) both the sudden drama of the episode, and the excavation of Combe from the landscape. She cordons off each short ejaculation in a mimicry of the formal regularity of the new Combe. She transforms the 'pert', 'sniggering' bedding plants from merely neat to aesthetically offensive, their appearance a gardened punch to the stomach of her envisaged inhabitation of Combe with Strachey, and her vision of its potential. Inappropriate bedding plants were a frequent bugbear to Carrington, and where the Combe bedding plants were an irritating outrage to her plans, more suggestively posed bedding offered future opportunities for amorous punning. 'Dreary' (if physically attractive) young men made 'good bedding plants', she wrote to Gertler in 1919—however they were 'not for use in the day-time'.⁴⁵ Accordingly, the viola might offer limited contingent satisfaction in its proper place. However, this "proper" place was not to be in Carrington Country, designed for a more intimate and lasting companionship. When this proper place materialised, it would have to be planted accordingly to align with her imaginings. However, wilder, bleaker landscapes were to take a backseat for the moment, and become emblematic of her private loneliness. Instead, as her intimacy with Strachey grew, Carrington would progressively work to cultivate a pastoral landscape to match up to Lytton's neo-Georgian passion for a simplistically read eighteenth-century.

Carrington's fast-growing correspondence with Strachey provided a touchstone for the development of her pastoral imaginations. Lytton was particularly enamoured with eighteenth-century

⁴⁵ Carrington to Gertler, in Chisholm, p. 116.

pastoral invocations of the classical—to Georgian poetic relocations to the country estates and ‘the garden traditions of Pliny, Horace, and Martial’—and to the poetic traditions of the eighteenth-century English Georgic, which appeared an apt genre in which to obscure modern queerness.⁴⁶ John Goodridge has demonstrated how the capacious genre worked to combine a pastoral vision of plenty with a rustic didacticism, humour, parody, and ‘deliberate inappropriateness’ in a ‘creative mixing-up of styles, purposes and generic expectations’ made necessary by a rising eighteenth-century distrust of set genre.⁴⁷ Lytton’s Georgian tastes were not unusual in the period (although he was a forerunner, having praised the Georgians since 1904): as the twentieth-century progressed, and in particular from the interwar years, modern tastemakers reappraised Georgian style as worthy of preservation.⁴⁸ Harris argues that Strachey in particular was ‘fascinated’ both with the period’s polite manufacturing of ‘an image of orderliness and leisure’ despite extreme, extended, socio-political turmoil; and with their conjunctions of ‘civility and raciness’.⁴⁹ Both points are accurate: but in addition, there is an immediate similarity in Goodridge’s characterisation of the eighteenth-century’s knowing generic mixing, and Reed’s characterisation of Bloomsbury’s queer epistolary style. This similarity is due in no small part to Strachey’s influence, but also demonstrates how the invocation of such traditions permitted Carrington’s attempts to manufacture rustic “simplicity” as a disguise for modern queerness.

For Lytton, the eighteenth century stood out alongside the ‘Age of the Antonines’: both appeared ‘enchanted islands of delight and repose’, with figures appearing ‘to live and move and have their being in some well-ordered garden, where the afternoons are long, and the peaches are plump and soft, and the library and the wine and the servants are within comfortable distance’ (if, of course, you were of a certain

⁴⁶ Dixon Hunt, *Gardens and the Picturesque*, p. 11-12.

⁴⁷ John Goodridge, *Rural Life in Eighteenth-Century English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 3; p. 4.

⁴⁸ Harris, *Romantic Moderns*, p. 59. Harris has surveyed this interwar renaissance, passing from the buildings of Oliver Hill to the writings of Woolf, the Sitwells, and Strachey to the Pipers’ hunt for English heritage and the documentation of country house Palladian style.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

class).⁵⁰ In contrast, Strachey argued, the twentieth-century had learnt ‘to cultivate its garden so well that it makes a profit of ten percent’ where the eighteenth ‘spent its leisure in the true process of cultivation. It ripened, and it matured; it did not advance’.⁵¹ Both period’s literatures receive a matching summation. Pope—perhaps most emblematic of Lytton’s garden repose—offered the way forward. Revisiting *Pastorals*, he unpicks a ‘perfect simplicity’: ‘everything is obvious’—the diction ‘a mass of *clichés*’, the ‘rhythm that of a rocking-horse; and the sentiment’ ‘mere sugar. But what a relief! What a relief to have escaped from *le mot proper* [...] from complicated states of mind, and all the profound obscurities of Shakespeare and Mr. T. S. Eliot!’⁵² It was a pastoral simplicity found in the garden: in ‘mossy fountains, and the green retreats’ borne out both in verse and in Pope’s own attention to the landscape gardens at his Twickenham villa, which were designed, Dixon Hunt writes, to foster proper critical contemplation.⁵³ It is this idyll that Carrington aimed to replicate: as I shortly discuss, “Carrington country” would move to become premised on a garden-based cultivation of this sense of retreat, cultivating “simplicity” and rustic authenticity above all.

Prior to Tidmarsh, Carrington and Strachey founded their companionship based on interpretations of pastoral history. They shared reading matter, with the works John Donne and Andrew Marvell giving Carrington particular joy (and reflecting, ironically, against Gertler’s continuing demands on her virginity—a topic of great interest in Bloomsbury). Her own references to Donne’s persuasive poems are frequently coyly disguised. They appear nestled amongst a 1916 letter recounting to Lytton a series of attacks on her lack of sexual behaviour when staying at Lady Ottoline Morell’s Oxfordshire Garsington.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Lytton Strachey, ‘English Letter Writers’, in *Characters and Commentaries* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1933), pp. 3-70 (p. 11; p. 12).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵² Lytton Strachey, ‘Pope’, in *Characters and Commentaries* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1933), pp. 279-296 (p. 290).

⁵³ Alexander Pope, in Strachey, ‘Pope’, p. 290; John Dixon Hunt, *The Figure in the Landscape: Poetry, Painting and Gardening During the Eighteenth-century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 62. For further study on the design of Pope’s landscapes, see Anthony Beckles Willson, ‘Alexander Pope’s Grotto in Twickenham’, *Garden History*, 26 (1998), 31-59.

⁵⁴ The pair were often (separately) at Garsington during the period, alongside various Slade colleagues, and other notable artists, writers and conscientious objectors who all spent time within Lady Ottoline’s remodelled formal

Such attacks frequently took place in the Morells' Italian gardens, and on this occasion, were double-pronged, with Philip Morell engaging her for an after-dinner walk around the pond before Ottoline 'seized' her to talk 'for one hour and a half in the asparagus [sic] bed late into the evening'.⁵⁵ After recounting such a trial, Carrington jumps to describe to Lytton 'Unconfined Love' (c. 1590), a standard Donnean treatise on promiscuity, as 'A lovely poem about Fair ships in Harbours'.⁵⁶ Placed in the context of such garden-based assaults, such an all-too-naïve description can only be a display of faux-innocence, another instance of pastoral play. Carrington's romantic efforts were, in the period, directed towards Strachey rather than Gertler, as was her discussion of Donne across correspondence and during their brief stay in a Welsh cottage, where it is likely that the pair attempted sexual activity.⁵⁷ Such attempts were short-lived on Strachey's part due to the pair's sexual incompatibility. Nevertheless, Carrington was to continue her pursuit of the companionable country escape, with Strachey prime focus.

Consequently, she was to continue journeying and writing about the countryside in pursuit of an appropriate locale, and as the years continued, she was to not just transform the landscape for her companions, but cast herself within it. Enamoured with an early visit to Vanessa and Clive Bell's Charleston, she would write to Vanessa:

Italian gardens from 1915. Once developed, Garsington possessed formal parterres and flower gardens, wilder woodlands, various ponds and pools, and a range of garden buildings from seventeenth-century stone dovecots to a new wooden summerhouse known as the Temple; walled vegetable gardens were turned to herbaceous beds edged with clipped box and yew; and a series of terraces were planned to descend to the main (greatly enlarged) pond, studded with cherubic sculpture, with gothic arches cut through yew so that visitors 'swimming or punting or just strolling could look out and see the blossoming trees in the orchard beyond'. Garsington was constructed from playful artifice, with Virginia Woolf acidly questioning 'is the sun ever normal at Garsington? No, I think the sky is done up in pale yellow silk, and certainly the cabbages are scented'. (Sandra Jobson Darroch, *Garsington Revisited: The Legend of Lady Ottoline Morrell Brought Up-to-Date* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2017), p. 213; Virginia Woolf, in Darroch, p. 203).

⁵⁵ Carrington to Lytton Strachey, in Chisholm, p. 42.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁵⁷ Whilst there is no confirmation, it is generally agreed upon by both Carrington and Lytton's biographers. See Paul Levy, 'Introduction', in *The Letters of Lytton Strachey*, ed. Paul Levy (London: Penguin, 2005), pp. vi-xv (xi-xii).

If you want a strong lad, or girl to cut down the overgrowth in the garden, paint the house inside, prune the trees, plant seeds or any other occupation [...] we would work very hard for you, & sleep in the loft in some hay.⁵⁸

Not content with representation, Carrington was to narrate herself into an intimately countrified ‘strong lad, or girl’—a remark revealing, through its slide through gender performance, her personal dissatisfaction with her female-ness, to present herself as a strongly and capably formed individual. She had always enjoyed a more ambiguous gender presentation, and the pair also enjoyed the ‘game’ of her dressing as a ‘fat cheeked Boy’, to the extent that they planned a 1917 walking tour in disguise.⁵⁹ ‘Hours were spent’, she described to Lytton, ‘strapping the locks back, and trying to persuade myself that the two cheeks like turnips on top of a hoe bore some resemblance to a very well nourished youth of sixteen’.⁶⁰ The trip never occurred (likely due to impracticalities); but a drawing imagined the possibilities. Lytton and a disguised boy-Carrington stand, gazing from the end of a lane towards a group of houses—looking as though they might have stepped straight from the pages of W. H. Davies’ 1908 *The Autobiography of a Super-Tramp* appraising the potential pickings to be had from a morning’s begging.⁶¹ Literary and art history continued to provide ways to narrate and share the possibilities of landscape anew.

Beyond enacting youthful boyhood, Carrington’s correspondence presents nicknames shared between her and Lytton that introduce a further pastoral cast, with her extensive self-description as ‘Mopsa’ acting with particular performativity. Mopsa appears in both Shakespeare’s 1623 *A Winter’s Tale* and Philip Sidney’s *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia* (1593) as a figure of fun.⁶² Sidney’s Mopsa is particularly unfortunate: a naïve and foolish accompaniment to the amorous deceptions of both

⁵⁸ Carrington to Vanessa Bell, in Chisholm, p. 102.

⁵⁹ Carrington to Lytton Strachey, in Chisholm, p. 67.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁶¹ A representation of this image can be found at Chisholm, p. 68.

⁶² I refer predominantly to Sidney’s *New Arcadia* (first published in 1593) here, as Sidney’s *Old Arcadia* was not published until Albert Feuillerat edition of Sidney’s *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia, Being the Original Version* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926).

Arcadias; a shepherdess unwittingly manipulated by courtly figures, providing prince Musidorus (disguised as the shepherd Dorus) the means to woo Pamela without arousing suspicion. Shakespeare's Mopsa is similarly gullible, her main role to contrast against the lost, royal Perdita (again living as a shepherdess)—and to be manipulated by the travelling pedlar and his printed ballads. These tales, Mopsa is misleadingly assured, are all 'very true'.⁶³ The pedlar's tales are of chaste girls turned to singing fish, of those in pursuit of a suitor—more fanciful tales of folklore and persuasion.

It is hard not to read Carrington's nickname as another extended literary joke. Where an allusion to Sidney's Mopsa might suggest Carrington and Lytton's growing companionship as outwardly obscuring Lytton's homosexuality, alluding to the Mopsa of *A Winter's Tale* also suggests the additional twist of the pedlar's ballads. Not only is this Mopsa proposed tales of sexual persuasion, but also of a girl fated to be immortalised in song as a 'cold fish'—an Elizabethan allusion for a woman unwilling to submit to amorous intent.⁶⁴ So considered, such references to early-modern pastoral permitted the pair to situate their dynamic within pastoral machinery. Goodridge examines how Sidney knowingly used the inherent illusion of pastoral tropes—'the far-from innocent plotting (the cross-dressing, inappropriate sexual and social behaviour)'—as a humorous acknowledgment of pastoral conceit.⁶⁵ Allusions to pastoral plotting made knowingly obfuscatory allusions to modern queerness: to such well-rehearsed tropes of disguise, rustic performance, and repose within distant rural communities, demonstrating Carrington and Lytton's awareness that deceptive rustic simplicity might be the ideal hiding-place for the less socially appropriate, and the queer. As the pair went on to build a home at Tidmarsh mill from 1917, and Carrington progressed to paint about their achievement, Carrington's guise of Mopsa—the figure permitting Lytton to pursue less "appropriate" romantic relations with other men—would become progressively apt.

⁶³ William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, ed. by John Pitcher (London: The Arden Shakespeare Third Series, 2010), 4.4.267.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.4.279-280; see also Pitcher's notes for lines 279-280 (p. 277).

⁶⁵ Goodridge, p. 3.

Quelque fois je voudrais être un garçon de moulin: Figuring the Tidmarsh Mill Pastoral

But Tidmarsh Mill it is to be. It's very romantic and lovely.

Vast Big rooms, 3 in number,
2 Very big bedrooms and 4 others,
Bathroom; water closet;
very good garden and a shady grass lawn
with river running through it.⁶⁶

The parish of Tidmarsh, Berkshire, lies south of Pangbourne. It is now a well-wooded domicile that was, during Carrington's residence, composed from a mix of arable and pasture-land and laced with the river Pang. Aside one of the river's offshoots stands the red-brick Mill House. The adjoining watermill had a historic pedigree, with records detailing the presence of a water-corn mill in the area from at least 1239: milling activities did not cease until 1937.⁶⁷ The working situation of the water mill was essential to Carrington's attempts, continued in private correspondence and in her paintings of the period, to situate Tidmarsh as the liveable materialisation of Carrington Country: a signal to working landscape for Carrington and Lytton to observe.

From Carrington's list of particulars, pulled into a (clumsy) verse form from her letter to Lytton, to her documentation of the move, she began the process of poeticising Tidmarsh from the beginning. 'Much heavy looting' went on from Ibthorpe, with everything packed 'with apples and artichokes and potatoes, instead of straw and paper'; aside from decorative pieces, the aforementioned appropriations were made up of 'a huge sack of plants, and bulbs for the garden and some carnations in pots'.⁶⁸ The fruits of garden production were foregrounded from the beginning: a poetic, protective wrapping for the

⁶⁶ Carrington to Lytton, Chisholm, p. 72.

⁶⁷ 'Parishes: Tidmarsh', in *A History of the County of Berkshire*, III, ed. by P. H. Ditchfield and William Page (London: Victoria County History, 1923), pp. 433-437 (p. 435); The Mills Archive, List of Millers at Tidmarsh Mill, EIGH-11-29.

⁶⁸ Carrington to Lytton, Chisholm, p. 78.

furnishings of their shared life. Consequently, preparing the garden was to be one of Carrington's first acts: bulb planting, in preparation for the years to come. Her Tidmarsh gardens spanned both sides of the sluiced Pang offshoot, and aside from the orchard and lawns possessed a meadow requiring scything, a 'Roman Bath' for outdoor bathing (as depicted in the suggestive 1919 ink *'Nude Bathers' The Roman Bath, Tidmarsh Mill*), classic English yews, vegetable plots, and a box-edged flower garden ripe for romantic planting. In true cottage garden style, these beds were bursting with varied tulips (Carrington's favourite), dahlias, larkspur, primroses, 'winter aconites, white anemones, sunflowers, crown imperials, pinks and sweet williams'.⁶⁹ In rustic reference to the *ferme ornée*, the idyll was finished off with a semi-productive *ménagerie*: 'many' cats to spot the lawns, honey bees, cockerels, ducks and hens, ewe lambs, and a doe rabbit.⁷⁰ The early Tidmarsh years were perhaps the happiest of Carrington's life, and marked a crescendo in her twinned visual and textual imaginations of landscape: her insistence upon the perpetuation of the idyll. Within her painting, this insistence materialises in a literal new direction in her landscape painting: a focus inward to the garden. Within this brief period of happiness, her painted "home" landscapes are overwhelmingly figured to pull inwards to the epicentre of the Carrington idyll: to demonstrate that she had found, at least for the moment, a suitable site for rustic repose with a loved companion.

In 1917, Carrington had made ink sketches for Lytton demonstrating the rough layout of aspects of the Tidmarsh grounds: neatly labelled, indicating in one drawing (figure 10) the layout of the front lawns, of orchard, greenhouse, and apple tree, and in the other (figure 11), the back view of the mill from the orchard garden, with the house peeking over a line of yew. The drawings are pared back and naïvely figured, yet detailed enough to demonstrate the lattice windows and gables demonstrating the historic character of the property. They also lightly suggest the importance of the garden to her interpretation of Tidmarsh's particulars: situating the aforementioned greenhouse; patterning the house front with

⁶⁹ Hill, p. 57.

⁷⁰ Carrington in Hill, p. 57.

climbers; populating the vielle with that seductive fruit. As figure 11 illuminates, the second drawing prioritises picturesqueness over practicality, with the Pang sluice taking centre stage and the Mill House overdrawn with trees. There is not a straight line between the two drawings: crooked windows and bulbous trees abound, with the lines of repeating yew mimicking in tone the childish “clump clump” of her written Nettleden clouds. In their picturesque irregularity, and their misleading formal simplicity, the drawings substantiate a certain rustic, historical “charm”. They are all ease—to borrow Lytton’s characterisation of Pope’s pastoral imagery, they are all “sugar”.

Figure 10. Dora Carrington, Letter Drawing of Tidmarsh for Lytton Strachey (1917) [redacted for copyright reasons].⁷¹

⁷¹ Chisholm, p. 71.

Figure 11. Dora Carrington, 'Back View of Mill from Orchard Garden', Letter Drawing for Lytton Strachey (1917)
[redacted for copyright reasons].⁷²

The Tidmarsh garden pictures mark a progression from Carrington's previous painted rural landscapes. There had been, in 1912, *Hoeing* (figure 12), her contribution to the Brownlow fresco series, featuring a working garden stamped with the naïvely registered 'luscious green fields' she had described to Nash.⁷³ Nettleden elms bare their ankles (Carrington had assured John that these elms were 'the best, the like of which [were] not found in any kingdom').⁷⁴ Golden and green fields pile up diagonally towards a woodland of green, blue and ochre in an emphasis of woodland and sky (as is common to her visual landscape compositions); all possessing a bulbous, vegetal quality reminiscent of her written lettuce-fields. In the foreground, a scene of hoeing and collecting is staged upon the outer edges of a modest cottage garden. Neat rows of heavy-looking cabbages spill leaves upwards; onions straggle across red

⁷² Chisholm, p. 72.

⁷³ Carrington to John Nash, in Ronald Blythe, p. 35.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

earth; a line of wilder bedfellows creep upwards from the lower centre, stretching into the sunflowers and larkspur marking the transition from vegetable patch to arable land.

Figure 12. Dora Carrington, *Hoeing* (detail), 1912, fresco at Ashbridge House, Ashbridge Management College [redacted for copyright reasons].⁷⁵

Crucially, this garden is not a *hortus conclusus*. It leads its viewer into the countryside, crisscrossing with the field-lines to the woodland horizon, as its inhabitants work stolidly in a scene

⁷⁵ Hill, p. 49.

bristling with texture and colour from foliage to pasture. In its push outwards and away it mirrors the focus of other pre-Tidmarsh paintings and drawings: oils like *Uplands around Hurstbourne Tarrant* (c. 1916) and *Hill in Snow at Hurstbourne Tarrant* (1916) pile hills upwards further still, in what can be read as her determination to escape repressive home dynamics; 1917 letter drawings like her imagination of her and Lytton a-tramping, and another evocative suggestion of companions embracing atop one of her bleak, wide hills place these landscapes of escape in hoped-for intimate contexts.⁷⁶ Through their piled-up topographies, these responses to landscape, whilst representational, demonstrate the like role imagination played in Carrington's paintings as her letter-scapes. Their distortion of form and perspective demands they be read in the context of her Slade compatriots, where, guided by Fry's 1911 determination in the 'imaginative necessity' of appearances over fact and their interpretations of the naïve forms of the Italian primitives, painters like the aforementioned Spencer pictured enduring, ahistorical, and intimately felt relationships with the land, rather than naturalist replications of the specific forms of particular landscapes.⁷⁷ As Holt argues, these often had nothing really to do with reality, and all to do with 'the imaginative lives of their creators'.⁷⁸ This is not quite what Carrington does. Rather, her part representational-part-imaginative landscapes register continued tensions: between the role of her private imagination in reshaping landscape, and between what that landscape, and its inhabitants, have to say. Consequently, these early landscapes often seem to be pulled in two directions. Whilst *Hoeing* demonstrates her fascination with the seductive production of garden landscapes—there is a stability her garden scene, and bounty too—she lingers simultaneously on the horizon and her escape outwards to wilder country.

In contrast, Carrington's painted Tidmarsh vistas are unusual for their directing of the viewer towards, rather than away from, home landscapes: a direction that appears to suggest a new-found

⁷⁶ The latter dated February 4, 1917, reproduced in Hill, p. 30.

⁷⁷ Fry in Holt, p. 86.

⁷⁸ Holt, p. 130.

(semi)stability. In particular, she returned to re-represent the Pang-sluiice garden view several times during her residency. The memorable *Tidmarsh Mill* (1918) is dominated by shouting reds and oranges looming upwards in the background and cast into the waterway in the foreground. As with her previous sketch, the Mill House peers through leftmost foliage—here, though, the sluice pulls the viewer towards the off-centre mill opening, whilst the deep textured greens of the reeds, trees and orchard edge embed the mill with a sense of wild, picturesque un-cultivation. *River Pang and Tidmarsh*, situated further back in the meadows, takes up the view again; with the 1920 *Tidmarsh Mill and Meadows* representing another angle back towards mill and house through more autumnal (if more muted) tones, and a more post-impressionist roughness of brush stroke.⁷⁹ In the latter, the viewer is set back under a great tree, looking out at the head of the sluice, as the vast expanse of water reflects and disturbs the more solid (yet obscured) buildings. The three exits of the watercourses travel beyond the compositional limits.

The Tidmarsh works are not obvious garden paintings, and there are nothing of *Hoeing's* cottage vegetables, nor workers. There are also none of her vegetable plots or tulips, only dark foliage creeping round the buildings. And yet the compositions do offer garden views, over the water-course, towards the mill buildings. They offer resplendent scenes, if ones with unsettlingly transient bases. As such, Carrington's garden views differ markedly from more generic garden painting around the period, both from the cheery Allingham idyll and the Elgood and co. canonisation of the grand English garden (and from the much-disparaged Merritt), and from the interwar garden painting genre reinvigorated by artist-plantmen like Charles Mahoney, Edward Bawden, Eric Ravilious, Evelyn Dunbar, Cedric Morris, and former correspondent John Nash. As noted, for the former group, such paintings contributed to a garden-based narrative about rural England, with the working cottage idyll on the one hand and the gardens of the elite on the other: whilst it was unlikely for workers to figure in polite demonstrations of taste, the cottage

⁷⁹ See Hill p. 46 for a black and white reproduction of *Tidmarsh Mill and Meadows*, and p. 48 for *River Pang and Tidmarsh Mill*.

idyll was likely to include a rustic stock figure to dictate how the scene should be read.⁸⁰ For the latter group, the gardener, the processes of garden work, and the (much-closer) garden boundary were frequently in close view. These were not gardens of prospect, but more modest, post-war gardens of sanctuary within “unquiet” English landscapes, and with a more understated attention to flora than the previous generation’s vistas, stuffed with poppies and peonies and tides of Michaelmas daisies.⁸¹

Where, then, do we locate Carrington’s garden views? They are not like Mahoney’s ‘Miss Edith inspects the Sweetpea’ (c.1934), or Dunbar’s thirties views of sparse winter veg plots and workers pruning climbers; and whilst they foreground the historic signifiers of an old working England, they are not populated with smiling workers or bright abundant blooms, or, in fact, any recognisably typical garden features at all.⁸² The absence of figures and typical garden signifiers adds a certain ahistoricity to Carrington’s views—with such temporally fluid (if not unpopulated) landscapes familiar to many of her Neo-Primitive associates. This view of the mill, we are led to imagine, could have been painted at any time in its long history. Combined with her reiteration of the view, we might consider her absence of typical “garden figures” to gesture to her want for the Tidmarsh idyll to persist, extending on the moment of occupation. So read, this Tidmarsh can be conceived as perpetuating on in its own historically-fluid timeline, primed and safe for queer companionship.

However, there is an additional consequence. Whilst it is common to read the painting’s two black swans as harmoniously transformed stand-ins for Carrington and Lytton, her transient, watery bases can also be read as imbuing her Tidmarsh landscapes with a sense of anxious instability—a fear, perhaps,

⁸⁰ For some further discussion on this school of garden picturing, see Elliott’s ‘Gardens Illustrated’; Postle’s ‘Country Gardens’; for a broader discussion of the Edwardian garden watercolourist, see Penelope Hobhouse and Christopher Wood’s *Painted Gardens: English Watercolours 1850-1914* (London: Pavilion, 1995).

⁸¹ See Christopher Neve, *Unquiet Landscape: Places and Landscape in 20th Century British Painting* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2020); this period of garden art is getting greater attention in recent years. From February to April 2020 The Garden Museum held an exhibition entitled *Sanctuary: Artist-Gardeners 1919-1939* exploring the period’s varied artistic responses to the garden.

⁸² See Evelyn Dunbar, ‘The Winter Garden’ and ‘The Garden’, 1937.

of the temporariness of her retreat.⁸³ And in their non-population, they are not just private paintings, but almost lonely ones. In this, they show more similarity to John Nash's later landscapes, with their own 'undertow of loneliness'.⁸⁴ Between the wars, Christopher Neve writes, Nash had also 'hid' in the countryside, and progressively, 'The only figure' in his 'landscape [was] Nash himself' and 'the viewer, and the degree of introspection implied by the paintings [made] the possibility of intrusion almost alarming'.⁸⁵ It is an argument that could also be applied to Carrington's visual garden retreats. Whilst their faux naïvetés might stylistically complement the landscapes imagined in correspondence, their silence ultimately signals that the idyll Carrington constructed was ultimately her own, and would not ever really be shared. Such a reading counterpoints her continued letter narrative, which pushes onward to companionship. Underneath the lively pastoral letter scene are more solitary landscapes that push out a second narrative: one of private introspection, and as the years progressed, desolation. Perhaps, then, we can read a final tension in her unpopulated garden views. Beyond the proposition of companionship within a well-populated, fruitful countryside, Carrington was still drawn to those bleaker, uncultivated sites. After all, if the ahistorical Tidmarsh view could be seen to represent any period from Tidmarsh's history, it need not register any of the marks of Carrington's cultivations. It may be that she chose to represent it unpopulated and uninhabited like the unruly deserted garden of Combe Manor.

Whilst Carrington's painted views offer more introspective private landscapes, her correspondence from the period nevertheless works hard to cast her pastoral with suitable figures for her companions. In one letter to Gertler, Carrington paints a lively description of time spent drawing the mill machinery:

⁸³ See Birrell for the most recent of this interpretation of Lytton and Carrington as swans: *Tidmarsh Mill*, Birrell argues, demonstrates Carrington 'as she contemplates the promise of' her new domestic world (p. 46). Other critics have also found a complicated sense of instability in the painting: for Elise L. Smith (2015) the watercourse makes for an 'unstable composition' (p. 40).

⁸⁴ Neve, p. 93.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

it was a wonderful feeling being up there surrounded by bulging sacks of flour & the great wheels grinding round & round and the whole room, which is indefinitely long and shaking & creaking—and then the smiling miller carrying, like some Michelangelo figure the heavy sacks on his broad shoulders. And a cat with speckled kittens lay asleep in a bag of wheat. It was so unreal, like the scene in one of those French books—by Daudet—one translates sometimes and never finishes – and then to know next door to that old mill house all those complicated relationships lived.⁸⁶

This is a very different mill picture. In this scene, movement dominates, with the mill wheels repeating their turns round and round. As before, her joining of one clause to the next feels motivated by whatever comes to mind first—each sentence break or dash running from the creaking room; on to the smiling miller, aestheticised into a Renaissance figure; on to the patterned cats, sleeping on despite their surroundings. Carrington’s expression bursts with largeness and noise, the scene shaking and bursting with the “unreality” she insists upon. It is by necessity a working idyll, marked with qualities of perpetual surprise and undefinition, as the indefiniteness of the room and the rotations of the wheel seem to extend on and on, extending without end into her recourses within cultural history.

Her comparison to Daudet offers another gesture to literary history, reanimating the Provence mill fictionalised in the 1869 *Letters from my Windmill*: a series of short stories roaming the French countryside. Daudet’s mill, reminiscent not just of Tidmarsh but of the lost ruin of Combe House, is described in the preamble to *Letters* as ‘abandoned for twenty years or more, and therefore unfit for grinding, as appears from the wild vines, mosses’, and rosemarys, climbing the sails.⁸⁷ ‘Such as it is’, ‘with its great wheel broken and its platform where the grass is growing between the bricks, the Sieur Daudet declares’ the mill ‘serviceable to his works of poesy’, if not milling.⁸⁸ Daudet’s stories roam the mill’s recent history and their local landscape: they are strange, fantastical, and often melancholy tales

⁸⁶ Carrington to Gertler, in Chisholm, p. 107.

⁸⁷ Alphonse Daudet, *Letters from my Mill & Letters to an Absent one* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), p. vii.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. vii.

melding folklore and tradition and adventure, as white goats escape enclosure in favour of a night with the wolves in the mountains: liberty, as for Carrington, is bittersweet, gained at terrible cost.⁸⁹ As with Carrington's letters, Daudet's tales rely on sensual scene-setting, bending local history into narrative in semi-autobiography, and demonstrating the potential of short, repeated episodic writings, more-or-less loosely characterised as letters, to imaginatively recast a local landscape.

So understood, Tidmarsh mill was also to be figured as serviceable to poesy: Carrington's poesy. What she wanted, she expressed to Lytton, was *'être un garçon de moulin'*—to be substituted for a beautiful miller's boy in Carrington country, and in so making, perhaps, an appropriate romantic partner for Lytton.⁹⁰ If this could not happen (and it could not, with any great success), she could maintain the poesy of Tidmarsh: she could continue to transform and people her gardened landscape; and she could continue, as Mopsa, to facilitate Lytton's own relationships. Consequently, her letters appear to attempt to share with Lytton a deferred form of intimacy within the gardens. Carrington wrote to Lytton of male beauty wherever she found it. One local boy 'had the loveliness of a Botticelli angel', and on trips to London she reported viewing both a 'very perfect tart of a young man', as well as revelling in the physiques on display at the British Museum ('oh Lytton, Antinous! What a Catamite to possess!').⁹¹ And after the introduction of Ralph to the Tidmarsh ménage, Carrington had another crucial character to mould into pastoral games: 'I've been drawing R. P. naked in the long grass in the orchard', she wrote to Lytton.⁹² 'I confess I got rather a flux over his legs and thighs. So much so that I didn't do very good drawings'.⁹³ Elsewhere, 'the bud Partridge' began to bloom—'he is so naïve and young', she wrote—and was frequently put to work in the garden:

⁸⁹ See 'M. Seguin's Goat', one of the stories in *Letters* (pp. 18-26).

⁹⁰ Carrington to Lytton Strachey, in Chisholm, p. 48.

⁹¹ Carrington to Lytton Strachey, in Chisholm, p. 98; p. 161; p. 104.

⁹² Carrington to Lytton Strachey, in Chisholm, p. 120.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

I joined him to my Battalion of slaves in the garden and made him plant beans & peas without a break till lunch! While the small boys watered the garden & cut the grass, I rode an imaginary steed round the footpaths cracking my whip and giving orders. All afternoon the Partridge planted parsnips in the garden.⁹⁴

There is a knowing suggestiveness to Carrington's episode—an enforced dynamic, of man at work, and Carrington to interpret (and so share in) his imagination for Strachey's benefit. And Lytton was not the only one to receive such descriptions. After Carrington's introduction to Gerald Brenan (and during the consequent Ralph-Carrington-Gerald triangle), she noted to Gerald how she made Ralph 'wear such nice clothes'; 'leather jerkins, & knee breeches so that so that he looks like some lovely serving Elizabethan man'—play-acting another character into Carrington country and imposing another imagined heritage on the Tidmarsh *ménage*.⁹⁵ Later, she described how 'R. P. comes down for weekends, & splits the wood, & saws it, with a naked torso. It was a wonderful vision to watch his huge marble body, with the great muscles swinging the hammer in rhythm yesterday in the garden'.⁹⁶ Even after Carrington had reluctantly married Ralph, and he became a progressive source of frustration, Carrington's textual picturings continued: 'he climbed to the very top of the big apple tree and picked the apples. He looked so lovely against the blue sky, his head and shoulders swaying like a fat quail on the slender branches [...] I lie in the wet grass looking up at Ralph amongst the shining red fruit—I want badly to use it in a picture'.⁹⁷ Here again is a productive landscape of sensual bounty, productive, as always, in more ways than one.

Crucially, within the Tidmarsh pastoral, Carrington's written workers move to more explicitly centre on the erotic possibilities of the male form. Such movements appear again as attempts to titillate Lytton—Carrington was now aware that their companionship could never be sexual, but also that he was very attracted to Ralph. Consequently, the aestheticisation of 'the bud Partridge' might act as a deferred

⁹⁴ Carrington to Lytton Strachey, in Chisholm, p. 124; p. 119.

⁹⁵ Carrington to Brenan, in Chisholm, p. 130.

⁹⁶ Carrington to Brenan, in Chisholm, p. 153.

⁹⁷ Carrington to Brenan, in Chisholm, p. 189.

form of sexual intimacy. In this sense, Carrington’s descriptions of the muscular Ralph, submerged in long orchard grass, planting parsnips, or sweating amongst the bean poles, take on the appearance of pastoral play, and Ralph becomes subsumed under an imaginative cloaking. The “innocent” Partridge might even be considered their very own Antinous—the drowned lover of Roman Emperor Hadrian, and an especially key figure to queer Bloomsbury. From, as Sarah Waters notes, pastoral invocations of Antinous as shepherd, to the figures collected by Thomas Gray and Horace Walpole on the ‘homosocial Grand Tour’ in the 1730s (two figures of especial importance to Lytton), he was a collectible reference for those in the know.⁹⁸ He had even been placed in sculpture form at the eastern edge of the Charleston garden pond by Duncan Grant: Quentin Bell remembered how the ‘life-size Antinous’ wandered ‘from place to place, from the middle of the orchard to the side of the pond’.⁹⁹ Whilst Tidmarsh lacked a carved Antinous, Carrington’s letters situate Ralph in a similar position—lounging in the orchard, swinging ‘his huge marble body’, put to work.¹⁰⁰ Ralph appears to have taken some part of the place of the cross-dressing Carrington of pre-Tidmarsh letters: a faux-naïve catamite, even, in Carrington and Lytton’s shared pastoral. Whilst she continued to personally pursue the delights of a strong working form, and to dress in men’s clothes, it was Ralph who was dressed as an Elizabethan serving man—Ralph who was stripped down in the orchard. Instead, Carrington was to maintain the Tidmarsh pastoral. The dynamic appears to have been initially successful. Carrington wrote briefly of a happy threesome within the Tidmarsh landscape: one that was, for the moment, successfully characterised by a “simplistic”, manufactured, historic charm capable of sustaining queer domesticity in safety.

⁹⁸ Sarah Waters, “‘The Most Famous Fairy in History’: Antinous and Homosexual Fantasy’, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 8 (1995), 194-230 (p. 198; p. 211); for further study on the idea of the “homosocial” tour, see also G. S. Rousseau, *Perilous Enlightenment: Pre- and Postmodern Discourses* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991): Rousseau writes that ‘[n]o one needs to search far into the ocean of eighteenth-century travel literature to recognise that the grand tour could be a disguise for the “erotic tour” [...] and that men could yearn to travel on foreign roads to seek out foreign boys’ (p. 30); and points to the existence of a congruence of artistic and erotic criteria in the ‘cult of Antinous’ (p. 191).

⁹⁹ Darren Clarke, ‘Duncan Grant and Charleston’s Queer Arcadia’, in *Queer Bloomsbury*, ed. by Brenda Helt and Madelyn Detloff (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp. 152-171 (p. 166); Quentin Bell in Clarke, p. 166.

¹⁰⁰ Carrington to Brenan, in Chisholm, p. 153.

Unfortunately, the Tidmarsh days were not to prove happy and endless. Returning from Italy in 1921, Carrington was caught between the providence of her garden and its enthusiastic overgrowth:

my dear, its [sic] too agitating the size of everything [...] the garden is a mass of confused vegetation, the orchard a wilderness of hay [...] we simply sit crushed; the labour necessary to control the establishment seems endless [...] but really its [sic] superb [...] there are masses of pears to eat, gooseberries, cherries, broad beans & new potatoes. But we groan & groan at the labours before us.¹⁰¹

No longer could she picture for Lytton empty days at leisure, for the need for work had overtaken the impulse for pastoral play. And from 1920, the rustic charms of Tidmarsh were beginning to feel flat and all-too provincial. She wrote to Brenan of not being able to bear ‘the flatness & greenery of England a second longer’; Tidmarsh seemed ‘incredibly squalid and cramped after the Ravello. And I hate those backyard hens and ducks’.¹⁰² In 1923, she wrote to Woolf how she had ‘suddenly felt’ ‘how very flat and provincial it was’; she could now ‘hardly bear the way that the elms seem to press against the windows’.¹⁰³ One of Carrington’s final Tidmarsh paintings, *Eggs on a Table* (1924), emphasises such frustration. Whilst Birrell reads the painting as a hopeful one, shrewdly noting that the three titular eggs can be read as Carrington, Lytton and Ralph ‘smoothed over [...] the eggs all fitting together perfectly in a simple and frictionless arrangement’, the scene does not seem settled.¹⁰⁴ *Eggs* is both a still life and another garden view: it brings quite literally to the table the fruits of the provincial livelihood she had begun to dread. It makes a charming, rustic scene, and yet her direction is once again changed. Carrington’s painting leads the viewer past the eggs and her tumbling floral arrangement, through the window, past the ducks on the path, over the fence, and out into the landscape beyond. Her landscaped

¹⁰¹ Carrington to Lytton Strachey, in Gerzina, *Carrington*, pp. 172-173.

¹⁰² Carrington to Brenan, in Chisholm, p. 152; p. 244.

¹⁰³ Carrington to Woolf, p. 241.

¹⁰⁴ Birrell, p. 71.

vision needed to adapt, and it was time to move: back near Combe, to Ham Spray: Carrington's 'perfect English Country House'.¹⁰⁵

The Barren and the Classical: Ham Spray and the Grove

Much like her beloved Combe Manor, the Queen Anne-fronted Ham Spray House provided a bleaker situation than Tidmarsh, possessing a long drive lined with limes 'but all wuthering in appearance, bleak, & the road a grass track', surrounded by a 'ram shackle lodge', 'barns in decay', and hidden round the back of 'a rather forbidding farmhouse'.¹⁰⁶ It nevertheless also had a garden 'gay' and 'romantic' with 'huge bushes of lavender and hot red pokers' and a 'sloping grass lawn as soft as the most expensive velvet' looking down over the Wiltshire downs.¹⁰⁷ With no houses in sight, and a haha leading to fields sloping 'at a distance of half a mile to the great downs' grazed by sheep and the odd cow, Ham Spray provided a greater sense of pastoral isolation, and a still greater integration between garden and countryside.¹⁰⁸ It remained a site from which to play with the classical—but importantly, this landscape was far better placed for Carrington to embrace her interest in wilder and bleaker landscapes, and her accompanying private desolations. One of the greatest benefits of Ham Spray was its immediate access to the Downs, and so any country charms and recourses to the pastoral were pitted against far less inhabited topographies. Figure 13 demonstrates such a development: Carrington's sketch maintains the "simplistic" historic charm of her earlier Tidmarsh drawings, and once again there is little suggestion of formal gardening. However, Ham Spray house is pictured subjugated to rough weather, trees bent sideways in the wind. In the presence of these great old trees, the façade and veranda of Ham Spray appear miniaturised in significance.

¹⁰⁵ Carrington in Hill, p. 91.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

Figure 13. Dora Carrington, 'Ham Spray House, Hungerford, Berks', letter drawing [redacted for copyright reasons].¹⁰⁹

Garden work nevertheless remained important: Carrington planned to cut down firs, and plant trees for her companions. On the 4th of March she wrote to Brenan of a mulberry for Lytton, 'Ralph a medlar, and I shall buy a tulip tree', with Gerard instructed to bring 'a small dragon's blood tree from Cadiz'.¹¹⁰ Carrington was seeking to populate her garden with arboreal counterparts: a mulberry for Lytton, in recognition of his literary talents; a magnolia for herself, so enamoured with tulip-like blooms; a dragon's blood tree for Gerard the inveterate traveller; and Ralph's medlar can be considered another (somewhat cutting) joke. The medlar has a literary heritage almost as expansive as the mulberry, but where the mulberry conjures up images of Shakespearean pilgrimage, the medlar is far less complimentary. Rather than gesturing to literary longevity, the Old English medlar fruit received the bawdy nickname 'open-arse', in recognition of its shape ('O that she were / An open-arse', jokes

¹⁰⁹ Chisholm, p. 255.

¹¹⁰ Carrington to Brenan, in Chisholm, p. 269.

Shakespeare's Mercutio, in response to Romeo's mooning over Juliet); and its unusual ripening habits were popularly referred to as an allusion to prostitution or moral failing more widely ('you'll be half rotten ere you be half ripe', snipes *As You Like It's* Rosalind to Touchstone).¹¹¹

It was a characterisation that lingered into the twentieth-century, and had been reiterated in Lawrence's 1923 collection *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*. 'Medlars and Sorb-Apples' describes the fruit as 'autumnal excrementa', but also as emblematic of a sexualised 'delicious rottenness' and simultaneous 'intoxication of loneliness'.¹¹² By 1924, Carrington found Lawrence ridiculous and had resolutely mocked his plans for an artist's commune in New Mexico: 'Mexico', she had quipped to Brenan, acidly, earlier in the same letter, 'is the only country where prophets and great writers are appreciated'.¹¹³ Aping Lawrence and his hunt for retreat, she parodies "'We live a very primitive life, we cut our own wood, we cook our own food" [...] I nearly said that he could come to Tidmarsh if that was all he wanted by primitivity'.¹¹⁴ 'I report this conversation', she concluded, 'so that you can have some account of our present day literary geniuses'.¹¹⁵ Despite this unfavourable summation of Lawrence's life, character, and literary worth, we can still read an intriguing similarity between their invocations of the medlar. It is intriguing that Carrington's medlar brings out yet another reference to sexual persuasion, but it is likely her gag was also meant to register the progressive frustrations of her continued relationship with Ralph, which she found frequently distressing. There is therefore something strangely familiar in Lawrence's medlar, symbolic both of contesting sexualised tensions and yet also an intoxicating solitude: something we can also read into Carrington's now equally tension-filled hunt for lasting companionship in the English Countryside,

¹¹¹ Alexander Stuart MacMillan, *Popular Names of Flowers, Fruits As Used in the County of Somerset and the Adjacent Parts of Devon, Dorset and Wilts* (Yeovil: Western Gazette &c., 1922), p. 209; William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. by Brian Gibbons (London: Arden Editions, 1980), 2.1.38 (See also Jonathan Goldberg's 'Romeo and Juliet's Open Rs', in *Queering the Renaissance*, ed. by Jonathan Goldberg (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), pp. 218-235); William Shakespeare, *As You Like It* (Minneapolis: First Avenue Editions, 2015), p. 72.

¹¹² D. H. Lawrence, 'Medlars and Sorb-Apples', in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* (New York: Thomas Seltzer, 1923), pp. 10-12 (p. 11; p. 10; p. 11).

¹¹³ Carrington to Brenan in Chisholm, p. 267,

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

and perhaps, too, in her own planting of a medlar. Although maybe this was a joke on Lawrence too: Carrington had also recorded that he had disparagingly referred to her ‘as very rich now’ and living ‘in a grand country house’—a house he could be made to bear witness to through the medlar planting, immortalised not as a genius, but as an open-arse.¹¹⁶

In addition to arboreal representations of her companions, Carrington’s velvet lawn was studded with ‘lovely red beeches, & huge ash trees’.¹¹⁷ It also possessed ilex, essential for her imagination of Lytton as ‘a bearded El Greco saint living in an ilex bower’.¹¹⁸ There was a kitchen garden, although the all-too-provincial ducks were replaced with pigeons to ‘dance quadrilles on the lawn’.¹¹⁹ Stephen Tomlin was commissioned for garden sculpture, providing a nymph of the aforementioned ilex ‘with the cornucopia of fruit’, ‘very classical and elegant’.¹²⁰ Such elements suggest the deepening importance of Mediterranean cultures to the Ham Spray pastoral, an influence borne out in Carrington’s more frequent excursions to Europe. The dramatic forms of Andalucía now appeared to better fulfil her notion of pastoral primitivity than the invocation of a rustic English countryside. Yegen, in particular, made ‘a unique Arcadia’: as she described to Francis Marshall, Ralph’s new love,

Who would go to parties in Fulham Road when she could sit over a log fire and watch the dancers of the *Alpujarras* and hear exquisite shepherds sing ravishing coplas?¹²¹

Metropolitan frivolity appears insufficient against the promise of truly rustic repose; and the Ham Spray *menage* dynamics had shifted further. True to form, Carrington repeated the episode to Lytton, describing the ‘lovely shepherd boy’—‘to make our presence less royal’, she continued, ‘Gerald asked the young

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 268.

¹¹⁷ Carrington in Hill, p. 91.

¹¹⁸ Carrington to Lytton Strachey, in Chisholm, p. 337.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 91.

¹²⁰ Carrington to Brenan, in Chisholm, p. 293.

¹²¹ Carrington to Frances Marshall, in Chisholm, p. 259.

man to dance with me [...] the young men are far better looking than the females'.¹²² 'We live like Princes', she narrated, depicting a scene of repose on a hot bank filled with 'wild smelling violets' and lined with 'exquisite bare poplars against the most delicate of blue skies'—'we live very idle lives here', she concluded.¹²³ Here, Carrington is no longer Mopsa, casting herself instead amongst the Royal Court. She would continue to love Lytton, but she was no longer satisfied to play a solely naïve part.

At home, Carrington's correspondence with intimate characters continued to be imbued with her newly Mediterranean pastoral, and to push out across the downs. To Gerald, she casts herself as 'a Botticelli nymph in a flowered shawl', to 'fly across hedges and dew ponds and treading softly on gentians', ready to meet him at the Inkpen Beacon.¹²⁴ After meeting the American journalist Henrietta Bingham, her 'exquisite ravisher', she described how they 'went for a long walk to the top of the Downs. And H and I went far across ploughed fields, through a little cornfield plantation until we came to the 'Shepherds Down'.¹²⁵ 'she won me', she continues, 'by being completely captivated by my Downs'.¹²⁶ Carrington had never 'seen the garden quite so exquisite', with the rose trees

Covered with flowers. Red hot pokers, moss in the bull rushes and many new flowers were in bloom. But nothing equalled the loveliness of those Downs, with the skylarks rising and falling in the air, singing their high transparent songs'.¹²⁷

The years continued her fascination with the wilder landscape over the garden, with her letters constructing ever-evocative expressions. 'Everyday', she noted to Brenan, 'I ride to the top of the Downs, and gallop along that grand track [...] The top of the Downs are pink with sorrel'; the woods full of

¹²² Carrington to Lytton Strachey, in Chisholm, p. 260.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 260-261.

¹²⁴ Carrington to Brenan, in Chisholm, p. 275.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 275.

creeping blues and pinks.¹²⁸ In a later instance, ‘the sky was a most delicate green tinged with pink and little clouds rose up from behind the crest of the downs, like balloons liberated by some hidden hand and floated up into the pale opal sky’.¹²⁹ Carrington’s landscapes become progressively fantastic: the Cranbourne Downs become characterised by ‘long stretches of pale olive green Downs covered with little juniper bushes which look like misshapen black beasts bewitched and routed to the ground’.¹³⁰ The garden begins to receive extended written description only in its more wildly transformative moments: one night, Carrington regales tending to a bonfire, the light of which transformed a marrow into ‘a huge pale prima donna on her couch, lit up by the footlights’.¹³¹ The garden, then, could only match up to the Downs when it permitted the nature of things to be changed completely. A little later, from her window, she watched the night recede:

Some bats and moths flew around, & round the house, then all the midnight animals retired. Rooks dominated everything with their cawing, a blackbird started to sing in the laurel hedge, and a pheasant answered him back on the field. Only the horses went on just the same [...] When it was quite light, a plough boy called the horses ‘cum-on, cum-on’ and they all drearily trooped off with funeral tameness.¹³²

Whilst the scene narrates Georgic familiarities, the working routines possess comparative dreariness—a ‘funereal’ obeisance and predictability—to the point of morbidity. The rustic English landscape was falling away, to be replaced by one that registered above all her flights into imagination.

Distanced from Mopsa, Carrington’s strange and classical landscapes now provided the backdrop for further games of Sapphic sexual persuasion. She was now spending much time with Augustus John and family, in particular, his two daughters, Poppet and Vivien. Alongside Julia Strachey, the John girls

¹²⁸ Carrington to Brenan, in Chisholm, p. 293.

¹²⁹ Carrington to Brenan, in Chisholm, p. 313.

¹³⁰ Carrington to Lytton Strachey, in Chisholm, p. 337.

¹³¹ Carrington to Rosamond Lehmann, in Chisholm, p. 364.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 364.

became two of her new ‘infinitely amorous’ correspondents.¹³³ Carrington and the Johns rode over the downs and around Fryern Court, the John country residence. This ‘melange of recumbent females’ possessed a garden filled with ‘ravishing flowers in spite of droughts. Grapes fell into one’s mouths and peaches lie upon the walks’.¹³⁴ Near Fryern lay a river for swimming, and for playing old games—‘Ralph’, she imagined for Lytton, looked ‘so lovely and naked, very brown with sun, swimming like an enormous Neptune amongst these sirens’.¹³⁵ The Johns made ideal companions for their own reverence of classical Mediterranean landscape. As Holt argues, Augustus John was one part of a cultural trend of modern painters looking to Europe in a desire for ‘Latinity’: such hunts aimed to avoid the identified commodification of English landscapes.¹³⁶ In Carrington’s case, this was in search of a sense of ‘that unique’ Yegen Arcadia in an attempted move towards continental European classicism.¹³⁷ John’s paintings provided Carrington with an alternative simplicity to English rusticity—as Holt described, frequently asserting a ‘primitive, remote and elemental scenery’.¹³⁸ These landscapes might be rudimentary in detail, envisaging, as in *Encampment on Dartmoor* (1906), John and family playing the part of the traveller complete with ‘bonny bairn and romantically dishevelled women-folk’.¹³⁹ Such a lack of situational detail suggested John’s landscapes to be ageless—potentially even placeless—and certainly separate from the English agrarian idyll. Such placelessness enabled representations of English rural scenes to be read as ancient, classical lands by virtue of referring to a generalised sense of an enduring historic Mediterranean: it was another way to extend on that pastoral moment.¹⁴⁰

Carrington’s Sapphic persuasions register the progressively classical leaning of her imaginings. Her letters to Poppet John were especially flirtatious. In 1928, Carrington accompanied a whimsical

¹³³ Carrington to Brenan, in Chisholm, p. 347.

¹³⁴ Carrington to Lytton, in Chisholm, p. 336; p. 362.

¹³⁵ Carrington to Lytton, in Chisholm, p. 346.

¹³⁶ Holt, p. 65.

¹³⁷ Carrington to Frances Marshall, in Chisholm, p. 259

¹³⁸ Holt, p. 53.

¹³⁹ Holt, p. 52.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

suggestive sketch of a reclining nude, modesty just provided by a climbing cat, with the claim ‘I do not know why this abandoned creature and Tiber have crept into this letter’.¹⁴¹ Carrington had sent a similar sketch to Julia in 1924, albeit with greater dedication to surroundings. A nude figure reclines, a cat curled at her crotch—here, however, the figure’s toes curl in suggested pleasure. Textured drapery gives way to an apparently open window, behind which an expanse of grass continues, spotted with large trees up to the horizon. Carrington’s sketch demonstrates a usual concentration of picturesque-ness over local detail. However, in a final nod to pastoral trickery, Carrington’s backdrop could be either an open window, or a framed landscape painting.

The nude-cat composition would reoccur—Poppet would receive another in 1928. Such drawings were frequently page-size, requiring Carrington to tuck the written aspects of her correspondence into the margins. One such memorable drawing positions the female nude, ornamented with a floral wreath, embracing a central tree in a wooded grove. Two partridges look on, and the tree is adorned with suitors’ initials. Carrington’s teasing accompaniment sprawls in pencil around the lower-right side: ‘sad picture of young girl who went mad and thought a “Forest of trees” were young men. Two little p birds mourn her sad fate. “Better love a bird than a wooden tree” they say’.¹⁴² Such a tale was likely prompted by Poppet’s previous letter, which appears to have recounted a midnight bathe and forest trip; however, typically, Carrington turns it on its head. The two Partridges (an allusion to Carrington and Ralph), look on in sadness that the nude allusion to Poppet is turned towards other suitors. Crucially, Carrington’s nudes do not appear to be self-portraits. Whilst naïvely figured, they bear more resemblance to their recipients than their sender. It is unlikely that Carrington would have felt comfortable representing herself in an explicitly feminine manner—after all, she had been pictorially represented as a hermaphrodite in Boris Anrep’s tiled mural for Lytton’s Ham Spray bedroom.¹⁴³ However, her more

¹⁴¹ Carrington to Poppet John, in Chisholm, p. 339.

¹⁴² Carrington to Poppet, in Chisholm, p. 343.

¹⁴³ Hill, p. 96.

ambiguous naïve figuring permits further instances of pastoral manipulation. As her double depiction of landscape and landscape painting, Carrington's faux-innocent 'I don't know why this abandoned creature and Tiber have crawled into this letter' puts into question exactly what is being presented in her nudes.¹⁴⁴ On the one hand, Carrington might be depicting separately herself and Tiber both; on the other, if we take the nude to represent Poppet, Carrington becomes Tiber. In both cases, the ambiguous presentation prompts the image of Carrington and Poppet joined, albeit in separation.

Carrington's more ambiguously figured ink groves continued to take on a more significance, moving off the page and into the garden. Referring to the arrangement trees in pattern—including, as Dixon Hunt notes, 'a pattern that appeared to deny any order', the grove might be considered as the peak of the naturalistic historical garden pastoral.¹⁴⁵ As Karina Williamson argues, they are consecrated to gods and spirits from Virgil to Pope, or to seventeenth-century lovers from Herrick to Vaughan: they suggest, above all, 'the shade' to be 'hallowed by the love game'.¹⁴⁶ Typically, the grove signified the safe repose of lovers in some future Elysium: the classical exercise in praise of country repose progressed through Renaissance poetry 'into a celebration of woods and groves as retreats of innocence'—or, for Carrington, queerness hidden in plain sight.¹⁴⁷ Whilst Carrington had identified the Ham Spray trees as making up pre-existing groves, one of her last garden developments was to plant up her own 'heavenly grove' with wildflowers in 1931.¹⁴⁸ Such work involved the painstaking clearing of rougher ground: the intention, Carrington noted ambiguously, was to 'appreciate the darker shades'.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ Carrington to Poppet John, in Chisholm, p. 339.

¹⁴⁵ John Dixon Hunt, *Garden and Grove: The Italian Renaissance Garden in the English Imagination: 1600-1750* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1986), p. 42.

¹⁴⁶ Karina Williamson, 'Wild Woods and Sacred Groves', *The Review of English Studies*, 34 (1983), 464-470 (p. 467).

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 468.

¹⁴⁸ Carrington to Julia Strachey, in Chisholm, p. 388.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 388.

Her plan was presciently memorial: after Lytton's death from stomach cancer in January 1932, and prior to her suicide that March, it offered some consolation. Bright with daffodils and snowdrops, 'it [began] to look really beautiful'.¹⁵⁰ She wrote to Gerald, describing her achievement.

When you next come to Ham Spray you'll see a very romantic grove with snowdrops under the Laurels, & Yews. If you ever see on your expeditions any mourning figures, or urns in the worst Victorian style suitable for my grove you might let me know.¹⁵¹

The grove was to offer a continuing memorial to Carrington's understanding of their pastoral companionship. It was also one which permitted a posthumous continuation of pastoral repose. As Chisholm notes, Carrington left a note to Ralph suggesting that after her suicide, her ashes be spread in the grove, and that Tomlin might complete a statue for the area. Unfortunately, it appears that Ralph ignored her requests.¹⁵²

Whilst it is conceivable that the Ham Spray grove was simply a convenient memorial accident, I want to consider an alternate possibility—that its purpose, as the final extension of the Carrington pastoral moment, had been planned far closer to its initial genesis. Lytton's physical fragility had been a constant part of their shared companionship, but in 1931, his health was in particular decline. Likewise, Carrington's own sense of solitude was proving more and more oppressive: unable to match her happiest years at Tidmarsh, and feeling progressively incapable of sustaining intimate relationships beyond her companionship with Lytton, her letters and diaries begin to demonstrate an ever worsening instability and concern with her "hybrid" state, to the point that even the presence of Ralph might prompt unwelcome remembrance of Tidmarsh years. It is possible that Carrington's "heavenly grove", hoped first to be the site for a memorial to her companionship with Lytton, before her own final resting place, might have been

¹⁵⁰ Carrington to Brenan, in Chisholm, p. 401.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 401.

¹⁵² prompting questions regarding the ultimate location of Carrington's remains, although he stated many years later that he had in fact scattered her ashes amongst the snowdrops (Chisholm, p. 404).

developed with such a double memorial function in mind. Reconsidering once again one of her final letters to Brennan, we can note the curiously depersonalised form of expression marking the prospect of his future visit, as she decontextualizes the “when” of his visit from her own presence—upon visiting, he will see the grove, adorned, hopefully, with snowdrops, but not necessarily Carrington. If such a de-personal emphasis cannot be read at least directly as Carrington’s own consciousness regarding her plans for death (and such plans do not here appear immediate, as Carrington informs Brennan that she would still like to know if suitable ornament becomes available in completion of her scheme); her letter, detached, yet still keen to emphasise the naturalist beauty of the landscape, demonstrates nevertheless that without live companionship—without her bearded El Greco saint—Carrington’s pastoral had been brought to an abrupt end. Solace might instead be found in the imagined continuation of her pastoral moment—for it was perhaps only ever really in imagination that such endless companionship could occur.

5 | Poetry, Plots and Pears: Warner's Interwar Georgic

Latterly I have realised that what I most deeply care for is the ground itself, and that a plot of earth, clean, and well dug, and raked fine, and in good heart, is the deepest gratification that all gardening affords me.¹

In 'The Way By Which I Have Come', a July 1939 article for rural reformer J. W. Robertson Scott's *The Countryman*, Sylvia Townsend Warner situated her growing political consciousness within her own rural village gardens, and in 'the responsibility to one's half-acre or whatever may be of tillable ground'.² In 1930, when beginning a Dorset 'warfare with weeds', flowers and herbs had appeared of most importance. A year or so later, she discovered that 'it was harder, and more interesting, to grow vegetables'.³ By her article's publication, it was the plot of earth that mattered most. She linked this progression to her equally developing appreciation of the realities of working village life. First came the flowers good and bad: local wisdom and tradition and 'the idiomatic quality of the English country worker' to be read against the equally florid 'violent dramas that explode among green pastures'.⁴ Next came 'more serious cabbages': material living conditions and 'the average number of sleepers per bedroom and rats per sleeper'.⁵ Finally came the understanding 'that the essential thing in gardens is the soil, and that the soil from which these people grow, the conditions which deform their lives, are more than Britain and the decay of British agriculture'.⁶ 'One must look farther', she argued, to reform the working countryside; one must work harder to tend the land for all.⁷ The 'farther' she envisioned was connected to 'those new tractors swinging over the U.S.S.R collective farms'. At the dawn of a second World War, she was looking for international political change, but it was change that began in the ground

¹ Sylvia Townsend Warner, 'The Way By Which I Have Come', in *With the Hunted: Selected Writings*, ed. By Peter Tolhurst (Norwich: Black Dog Books, 2012), pp. 13-20 (p. 19).

² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19; p. 20.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

of her Dorset cottage plot. This plot, like her other gardens within the county and in rural Norfolk, was one that mirrored her literary examinations of the cultural “worth” of canonical representations of country life, and the poetic and economic concerns underpinning the cultivation of the rural garden.

This chapter unpacks how Warner used the interwar garden as a means of troubling contemporary valuations of country landscape in her progression towards Marxism. Moving from the early poetry of *The Espalier* (1925) and prose *Lolly Willowes* (1926), through her verse epic *Opus 7* (1930), the historical fiction of *The Summer Will Show* (1936), to her 1939 essay, I read her texts against personal letters and garden plots. Arguing that much of Warner’s writing during the period can be considered as within Georgic literary tradition, I suggest that her twinned texts and garden plots materialise her progressively radical concern with the representation of rural England. Her interwar writings abound with new pairings of garden cultivation and cultural value: flowers and weeds are wont to be aestheticised alike; gardened class signifiers are mocked; and the question of who can afford to cultivate for beauty repeats throughout her texts. And Warner’s valuations of the country garden are not just aesthetic, cultural, and social, but economic too, as she costs up her plots for her reader. Her interwar garden georgic—her re-readings of the literary traditions of viewing landscape through her interrogations of rural economies—situates her developing political consciousness and demonstrates how the country garden could be refigured to possess new, radical capabilities.

Unlike the other gardens narratives cultivated in this thesis, Warner was not as explicitly interested in cultivating a rural retreat. She was not, like Jekyll, looking to cultivate a picturesque rural England that composed an attractive picture of a threatened historic countryside; and neither was she, like Watts, landscaping to narrate the continued relevance of her contributions to the modern arts. Whilst she was, like the early Ford, highly attuned to the social costs of the landscapes she inhabited; and whilst she also worked on vernacular cottage plots previously inhabited by labourers, she continued to view her plots with their proximity to rural poverty in mind. Like Carrington, her country residences needed to

accommodate queer companionship: she made gardens with her long-term partner, the poet Valentine Ackland, at Miss Green's Cottage in Chaldon Herring (1930-1933), at Frankfort Manor (1933-1934), at 34 West Chaldon (1934-1937), and at Riverside, Frome Vauchurch (1937-1978). Whilst she too plundered cultural history in her own narratives about rural England, this was not to substantiate a historically fluid liveable idyll: Warner's gardens were always impacted by contemporary politics. Take, for instance, the political earth of her 1939 essay: this garden did not seek escape, but was explicitly post Great War (if there 'had been a demand for shepherdesses', she wrote, 'I think I would have volunteered for such work. As it was, I turned to man and metal': refugee work and supplementary munition-making rather than pastoral play).⁸ This garden was also after the Spanish Civil War defeat (a 'loss' also for the English rural poor, she argued); it is considered against Soviet agricultural reform; and it is a garden (just) ahead of the Second World War.⁹ Warner was not content to rest on idyllic ways of thinking, but rather to situate the local garden as possible site for revolution. As she investigated the practical conditions and the representative tropes of English countryside, she retrofitted modern literature to match.

This chapter contributes to the recent scholarly tradition aiming to pin down Warner's extremely varied corpus and persistent play with literary form.¹⁰ Her texts are formally mutable, deeply engaged with the function of genre, and steeped in layers of reference: they can be at once sharp and playful, comic and melancholic, biting direct and yet ambiguous. They are consequently difficult to categorise.

⁸ Ibid., p. 14.

⁹ Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁰ Between 1929 and 1977 she published over 150 short stories in the *New Yorker*, besides further poetry and six additional novels. Her novels alone have a wide historical and geographical reach, ranging from a fourteenth-century monastery through eighteenth-century Spain, revolutionary Paris, nineteenth century Polynesia, and interwar rural England--amongst others! Gilian Beer offers an interesting summation of the exploratory prescience of Warner's novels and their generic expectations (Gilian Beer, *Sylvia Townsend Warner: 'The Centrifugal Kick'*, in *Women Writers of the 1930s: Gender, Politics, History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 18-31. On the tricky matter of Warner's reception see Jan Montefiore, 'Admired, Belittled, Beloved: The Critical Reception of Sylvia Townsend Warner', *The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society*, 18 (2018), 10-28; Such, indeed, is the complexity of Warner's written textures that Ewins ultimately concludes that despite her position within interwar socialist literary criticism, Warner's own works fail to adhere to a 'programmatic socialist realist aesthetic' (Kirstin Ewins, 'The Question of Socialist Writing and Sylvia Townsend Warner in the Thirties', *Literature Compass*, 5 (2008), 657-667 (p. 664).

She has been read as a Georgian, a modernist and a socialist, with her interest in rural life, historic style, and literary traditions like the pastoral complicating her reception.¹¹ Recently, Peter Swaab has aptly posited that her diverse career demonstrates a ‘romantic commitment to emancipation and individuality’ felt in unexpected narrative experiments: this interest in the individual must nevertheless be squared against her also considerable commitment to collective organisation, centred around her and Ackland’s 1935 acceptance into the Communist Party.¹² Warner’s interwar texts should therefore be read in the context of contemporary English debate aiming towards a socialist realism scored against a high modernism viewed within such circles as ‘apolitical’ and ‘decadent’.¹³ And indeed they have: David James has read her thirties work as calling for ‘a reassessment of how, and for whom, “new” literature [was] operating’; and in her study of the crossover between Warner’s writing and her early career as musicologist, Gemma Moss has offered an analysis of her concern with the material conditions of aesthetic production, individual perception, and ‘the ways in which aesthetic experiences inform social and political life’.¹⁴ From her earlier works, *Lolly Willows* in particular has been mined for references, although her early poetry remains underexplored, as does *Opus 7*: few critics, Janet Montefiore noted in 2013, go far beyond her four early novels, a critique of Warner studies recently reiterated by Swaab.¹⁵

¹¹ For instance, in a 1926 *Poetry* review, Louis Untermeyer attributed *The Espalier* to the anti-Georgian poetic camp that he attributed as contributing to Edward Marsh’s decision to discontinue his biennial Georgian poetry editions; on the other hand, Matthew Mitton sees a ‘Georgian tweeness’ in the very same collection. (Louis Untermeyer, ‘Anti-Georgian’, *Poetry*, Vol. 28, No. 4., July 1926, pp. 224-227 (p. 224); Matthew Mitton, ‘Two Women Poets’, *Women: A Cultural Review*, 22 (2011), 91-94 (p. 91)).

¹² Peter Swaab, ‘Sylvia Townsend Warner and the Possibilities of Freedom: The Sylvia Townsend Warner Society Lecture 2019’, *The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society*, 20 (202), 63-88 (p. 67).

¹³ Ewins, p. 659; Ewins provides a useful review of Warner’s contributions to thirties socialist writing. English debates about the nature of socialist fiction stemmed from the 1934 Writers’ Congress in Moscow and were discussed through the *Left Review*, after the British Section of the Writer’s International at Conway Hall in 1934—of which Warner was in attendance. In 1937, Warner and Ackland were two of the British Writers to attend the Congress of the International Association of Writers for the Defence of Culture in Barcelona. It was not their first time organising in Catalonia: In 1936, they had worked for a Barcelonan Red Cross Unit during the Spanish Civil War. At home they set up the Dorset branch of The Left Book Club, encouraging anti-fascist reading and writing practices. (See also Gemma Moss, *Modernism, Music and the Politics of Aesthetics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021)).

¹⁴ David James, ‘Realism, Late Modernist Abstraction, and Sylvia Townsend Warner’s Fictions of Impersonality’, *Modernism/Modernity*, 12 (2005), 111-131 (p. 113); Moss, p. 115; p. 153; Moss, p. xi.

¹⁵ Between 1984 and 2013 Montefiore counted that there were 14 essays on *Lolly* alone, plus substantial book commentary. Recently, this tide has started to turn, with Paul Robichaud’s recent essay on *The Espalier*. On *Opus 7*, Peter Swaab has commented that ‘even those few critics who have written well about her poetry (notably David

There is still more to do in tracking her socialist writing into her earlier work. Thus far Warner's rural writing and interrogation of genre has predominantly prompted readings centring on her representations of women (Murray, Nesbitt, Montefiore), or on unpicking agency in her rural characters (Robichaud, Swaab, Murray).¹⁶ Those interested in her communism tend not to delve too far into her interest in pastoral or georgic mechanics (Montefiore, James, Ewins, Croft, Jouannou), and those interested in her early rural politics work less on her communism (Murray, Swaab).¹⁷ And despite frequent references to 'The Way by Which I have Come' as demonstrative of Warner's interest in rural reform both actual and literary, her conclusory vision of U.S.S.R machinery remains underexamined within the wider context of her work. Mary Jacobs' sadly uncompleted study of how her interest in genre contributed to her radical politics has taken us the closest, but still retain a predominate focus on the individuals, rather than the places, that fill her literary landscapes.¹⁸ Nevertheless, Warner's textual explorations of form and genre were contextualised by specific locations. She had early determined that 'no artist's work has purely absolute value. It is conditioned by time and place'.¹⁹ This time and place was often the interwar country garden: a place where form and function were also under scrutiny.

Davie, John Lucas, and Janet Montefiore) have had almost nothing to say about *Opus 7*. See Janet Montefiore, 'Sylvia Townsend Warner Scholarship 1978-2013: An Annotated Bibliography with Introduction', *Literature Compass*, 11 (2014), 786-811 (p. 788); Paul Robichaud, 'Pastoral Revisions in Sylvia Townsend Warner's *The Espalier*', *The Journal of The Sylvia Townsend Warner Society*, 18 (2019), 41-49; Swaab, p. 73.

¹⁶ Jane Feather differs in her consideration of Warner and the pastoral, centring her intriguing discussion on Warner's exploitation of metaphor in *The Corner that Held Them* (1949). Jane Feather, 'Sylvia Townsend Warner and the Rhapsodic Pastoral', *The Journal of The Sylvia Townsend Warner Society*, 14(1), (2013), 1-16; see also Alex Murray, 'Jerusalem Building: *Lolly Willows*, Blake and Rural Politics' *Modernist Cultures*, 15 (2020), 419-441; Jennifer Poulos Nesbitt, 'Footsteps in Red Ink: Body and Landscape in "Lolly Willows"', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 49 (2003), 449-471; Jennifer Poulos Nesbitt, *Narrative Settlements: Geographies of British Women's Fiction Between the Wars* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

¹⁷ Janet Montefiore, *Men and Women Writers of the 1930s: The Dangerous Flood of History* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996); Andy Croft, *Red Letter Days: British Fiction in the 1930s* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990); Maroula Jouannou, 'Sylvia Townsend Warner in the 1930s', in *A Weapon in the Struggle: The Cultural History of the Communist Party in Great Britain*, ed. by Andy Croft (London: Pluto Press, 1998), pp. 89-105.

¹⁸ See in particular Jacobs' 'Sylvia Townsend Warner and the Politics of the English Pastoral 1925-1934', in *Critical Essays on Sylvia Townsend Warner, English Novelist 1893-1978*, ed. by Gill Davies, David Malcolm, John Simons (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 2006), pp. 61-82; also Mary Jacobs, 'Trees and Dreams: Sylvia Townsend Warner, the Pastoral and Fantastic Ruralism', *The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society*, 12 (1) (2011), 1-16; Mary Jacobs, 'The Politics of Disclosure and the Fable', *The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society*, 7 (1) (2020), 17-35.

¹⁹ Sylvia Townsend Warner, 'Doubting Castle', *The Musical Times*, 64 (April 1924), pp. 155-168 (p. 157).

Seeding Flowers: Generic Cultivation and the *Bon Chrétien*

I've sat in the sun
From three to five
Watching the bees
About the hive.
They are horribly alive!²⁰

Like many poems from *The Espalier*, 'Honey for Tea' steeps a landscape of middle-class respectability in discomfort. For Warner's speaker, sat idly in a sunny garden, this discomfort arises from the 'maniac / Industry' of the insects: they are joyless, 'armed' and 'incurious', and yet also 'so sufficient'.²¹ It is this sufficiency which is most alarming to the jealous speaker: 'Oh, horrible', they continue, 'that aught can be / So sufficient, yet / So unlike me!'.²² 'Aghast', the speaker goes in to tea, and to a peace of mind restored by parlour furnishings. Inside is the calming 'sturdy table' ('so plain and whole'), 'the meek sweet / Of the sugar bowl', and 'the china dishes' 'obedient to my wishes'—these trappings of middle-class respectability, the speaker argues, 'shall confirm my soul'.²³ So 'emboldened', they may sup upon 'The hoarded treasure, / Taken by stealth / From that inimical Commonwealth'.²⁴

Warner's bees are posed in opposition to light casual domesticity. There is something funny about the alarm they cause—something familiar in the disturbed fascination with a form so apparently abstracted from one's own—and yet, the bees are not separated from the speaker. They remain just outside in the garden, for one; they remain a part of that "respectable" landscape. Warner updates Georgic tradition for to speak about modern rural England: in this case, Virgil's interest in the hive as a rebellious

²⁰ Sylvia Townsend Warner, 'Honey For Tea', in *The Espalier* (New York: The Dial Press, 1925), pp. 76-77. p. 76.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 76. p. 77.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 77.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

model for good human governance. Within ‘Honey for Tea’, it is not the bees that rely on the beekeeper, but rather the beekeeper that relies on the bees: to provide the sweet teatime subsistence, to be consumed on sturdy table and obedient dish (and to hope that the bees don’t notice). Warner’s frighteningly sufficient martial insects highlight the appropriations implicit in comfortable poetic landscapes. By satirising the unease of the socially comfortable, Warner’s depiction of the apparent threat of an organised workforce makes a twentieth-century leftist mockery of imperialist politics. This reappraisal begins in the sunny garden, and is brought about by a knowing manipulation of poetic tradition bringing Warner into direct dialogue with literary history.

Warner’s strategy occupies much of *The Espalier*: throughout the volume, she situates the garden as a key location of satiric reappraisals of rural life to bring the reader’s attention to the “cultivations” of literary history. Such a mission is suggested in Warner’s reasoning for her title: it was ‘expressive’, she argued, of ‘a naturally straggling plant such as the mind is’, ‘formalised into producing fruit’²⁵ Once again, she twins poetic and agricultural practice; once again, she focuses on processes of cultivation over the fruits. Like the knowing references of ‘Honey for Tea’, such strategies repeatedly bring to attention poetic working traditions of adaption. Her perennial gesturing to literary tradition marks her most substantial Georgic conceit: likening the acts of intervening in cultural canons to agricultural cultivation to concentrate on the conditions of production. Warner’s play with forms and references critiques the role literary tradition takes in shaping cultural values. And throughout *The Espalier*, she jumps between a range of formal traditions and structures, working with performed references to literary history.²⁶ She works most frequently in quatrains or sestains (and always in rhyme), metrically moving between running iambs and inconsistent stresses. Revitalising, as Harman has noted, forms not ‘simply traditional but

²⁵ Warner to Charles Prentice, 5 January 1925, in Claire Harman, *Sylvia Townsend Warner: A Biography* (London: Penguin, 2015), p. 62.

²⁶ Robichaud unpicks many of the references from *The Espalier* that are outside my scope—particularly looking at poetry that can be read in tandem with A. E. Housman, Edward Thomas, (and some Hardy), to suggest Warner’s gendered repositioning of pastoral tradition.

almost quaint in 1925', she moves from folk ballad to hymn to comically caustic epigrams and the collection of damning village epitaphs:

John Bird, a labourer, lies here,
Who served the earth for sixty years
With spade and mattock, drill and plough;
But never found it kind till now.²⁷

Like Ford's briefly dire 'The Peasant's Apology', Warner memorialises a suffering rural population that finds little kindness in their living conditions. She too makes a macabre disavowal of the ideal of the healthy, happy field worker, directly signalling to genre. Here, the epitaph—a genre with its own long history of redefining public response to human mortality by purporting to allow us access to lives lost—is used to memorialise not just an individual, but their suffering.²⁸ As for Ford, death is omnipresent in *The Espalier* (here it even becomes a kindness), and Warner invites us to think on how we memorialise rural England.

From the village graveyard Warner moves frequently to the garden plot as she twins literary and horticultural cultivation. There is 'The Sick Man's Garden', where she inspects the 'unkempt' plot of a chronically ill man and looks on to its future reversion to 'wild earth'.²⁹ Then there is 'Moping Castle', where Warner places poetic and economic explanations for a landowner's fir-planting in dialogue. Her speaker characterises the firs as those trees 'the most adverse / To mortal cheer': the firs must, they decide, 'all' the planter's 'sighs rehearse', offering an arboreal representation of imagined frustrated 'prime', of rebelling wife and sons, of 'mouldered heart entombed / In waste of time', in hyperbolically parodic archaism.³⁰ Warner is again appropriating literary history—in this instance, Hardy's 'The Pine

²⁷ Harman, p. 62; Sylvia Townsend Warner, 'Epitaphs', in in *The Espalier* (New York: The Dial Press, 1925), pp. 43-44 (p. 44).

²⁸ See Joshua Scodel, *The English Poetic Epitaph: Commemoration and Conflict from Jonson to Wordsworth* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1991).

²⁹ Sylvia Townsend Warner, 'The Sick Man's Garden' in *The Espalier* (New York: The Dial Press, 1925), pp. 62-64. (p. 62; p. 64).

³⁰ Sylvia Townsend Warner, 'Moping Castle', in *The Espalier* (New York: The Dial Press, 1925), pp. 61-62 (p. 61).

Planters' (1909).³¹ Hardy's pines prove a permanent reminder of one of their planter's romantic anguish ('We set it growing / in this bleak spot, / It will still grieve here / Throughout its time, / Unable to leave here, or change its clime').³² In contrast, Warner's firs have a simpler, economic explanation: her planter, 'meant / No clue so apt for verse /'.³³ Rather, 'Soon ripe for felling, / Firs are a good investment'.³⁴ Unlike Hardy's grieving pines, Warner's firs are short-lived, as she again warns against one-sided poetic interpretations of landscape.

A complementary argument also appears within 'Peeping Tom', where the titular Tom, a farm labourer, wishes for 'half an acre' of his own to cultivate potatoes 'and a few beans'.³⁵ His request appears 'a good joke' to a rich farmer, who gifts him an unfenced, untilled, coast-adjacent chalky plot far from field and village, where nothing will grow, despite Tom's best efforts.³⁶ He is suddenly 'awakened' to the beauty of the weeds that he cannot prevent: 'for too long', he realises, he 'had watched a wildflower's visage, and had seen / No hope, no purpose there'.³⁷ Unfortunately, his woes are not over: now changed, he cannot bring himself to weed his farmer's fields, and is let go for negligence. 'Times were slack'—he does not work again and is finally encountered by the speaker back on his plot, elderly, 'in doubt / Of where he was', back to pulling up weeds.³⁸

Warner's poetic consideration of garden cultivation here deliberates on the culturally relative values of productive versus unproductive plant life. Whilst Warner satirises the idea that land ownership

³¹ Hardy's poem was also itself an example of literary adaption, being written as a companion to *The Woodlanders* (1887) and published in separate accompanying parts, part II published first in 1903 in *Cornhill Magazine*, with part I added upon later collection: see Richard Little Purdy (ed.) *Thomas Hardy: A Bibliographic Study* (New Castle; Delaware: Oak Knoll Press and London: The British Library, 2002), pp. 145-146).

³² Thomas Hardy, 'The Pine Planters (Marty South's Reverie)', in *Time's Laughingstocks* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1909), pp. 158-160 (p. 160).

³³ Warner, 'Moping Castle', p. 62.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

³⁵ Sylvia Townsend Warner, 'Peeping Tom', *The Espalier* (New York: The Dial Press, 1925), pp. 92-103 (p. 93).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 100; p. 103.

is the be-all-and-end-all, her verse is also a commentary on the competition between the different cultural capitals of efficiently productive and aesthetically stimulating landscapes.³⁹ Her competition is brought sharply into focus through deliberate formal clashes. Her verse begins with Tom's practical, methodical attention to clearing the land, registered in a matter-of-fact expression and a staid, rhymical progression of simplistic four-line stanzas:

And fresh weeds grew
That had not grown before;
For each he spudded
There sprang ten more ⁴⁰

However, from the awakening of Tom's romantic consciousness, Warner jumps into hyperbolic exaltations replete with metaphor and cliché. '[H]idden under her dark veils of Time and Space', Nature cries out from the hillside: 'Had I died, had I died',

Perished had with me, unguessed, the clue of the whole.
But now are the heavens opened, and Salvation
Is sprung up like a flower out of the earth.
Look! I am newly-made, the dew of my birth
Is of the womb of the morning ⁴¹

Warner's leap from the literal to the metaphorical parodies an exaggeratedly sentimental attitude to the land through its attempt to force the reader's awareness of her clashes of formal construction. If Tom is to take seriously the cultural capital of the picturesque wilderness (or the rhapsodic 'Salvation' of the poet), he is, Warner suggests, useless as an efficient farmhand. It is a damning judgement on the intersection of class and poetic value. By bringing the processes of land and poetic cultivation together on the page, Warner argues that the states of mind conducive to an aesthetic appreciation separated from a productivity-focused value system preclude the rural labourer. Under this reading, Tom cannot afford either to work his land, nor poeticise it. But what was the solution?

³⁹ and stresses the importance of the appropriate situation of a garden plot.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 96.

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 97-98.

The Espalier and poor old Peeping Tom were informed by Warner's time in the Dorset village of Chaldon Herring, progressively the focus of her Georgic resituations. Warner had first encountered Chaldon in 1922 through T. F. Powys, whose work she had been introduced to the previous year: all proved influences that quickly held fast. She was soon working steadily through rural literary tradition in her search across genres to pin down an appropriately "truthful" rural writing. Powys was a prime interest, but there was also, as she later remembered in 'The Way by Which I Have Come', 'Cobbett and the Hammonds and Mrs. May' (a landlady in the Essex marshes); 'Crabbe and my grandmother' (equally cognizant of the frequency of incest, 'rape and brutality' in the rural village); 'and a series of articles called "England's Green and Pleasant Land"' (authored by Robertson Scott, a continually blazing critic of rural poverty).⁴²

Warner's packed list brings together a range of figures essential to her developing understanding of the state of modern countryside. She undeniably finds Cobbett a more radical figure than Jekyll; especially when paired with J. L. and Barbara Hammond's *The Village Labourer, 1760-1832*: an attempt to outline the impact of government rural reform on the labouring poor and constitution of the rural village, emphasising the class disparities informing progressive rural disenfranchisement, tracking through the eighteenth-century enclosure of common land through to the 1832 labour revolts.⁴³ Her list continues to provide radical context. From 1923, Robertson Scott was working with his wife Elspet to alleviate the poverty of Idbury, a Cotswolds hamlet 'full of picturesque cottages that had gone bad', and writing about it.⁴⁴ Robertson Scott was particularly concerned with the cosmopolitan turn towards rural

⁴² Warner, 'The Way by Which I Have Come', p. 16.

⁴³as well as the better-known *Rural Rides* (1830), amongst many other texts. William Cobbett, *The English Gardener* (London, William Cobbett, 1829); see Ian Dyck, *William Cobbett and Rural Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). J. L. Hammond and Barbara Hammond, *The Village Labourer, 1760-1832: A Study in the Government of England Before the Reform Bill* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1932).

⁴⁴ Warner, 'The Way by Which I have come', p. 17.

retreat, and its gentrifying impact on working class populations; but he also looked to reform village conditions, and as a later *Tribune* reviewer noted, ‘to rip the roses off the front of the slum cottage’.⁴⁵ Warner had seen his mission first-hand in 1925, when she rented one of his cottages for the summer, and counted herself amongst *The Countryman*’s earliest subscribers: ‘never before’, she summarised, had she ‘met reformers with such a well-adjusted equation of lack of illusion and fullness of hope’.⁴⁶ As I later discuss, George Crabbe’s poetic scrutiny of the (mis)representativeness of literary pastoral was a persistent influence on Warner’s own attention to literary villages; and to conclude her polyphony of social, practical, and poetic approaches to rural reform, she raises those voices of a more personal (though none-the-less essential) weighting. Her grandmother, who had a country living in Alford on the Surrey-Sussex border (around 11 miles from Godalming), had reported a very different Surrey landscape from Jekyll: the ‘iniquities she had thought of as rare vestigial occurrences in crime-sheets persisted and were taken as a matter of course among these cottage homes of England’; and Mrs May, Warner’s host during a month-long 1923 excursion to the Essex marshes, had illuminated her on modern ‘agriculture and the problems of the small farmer’.⁴⁷ All, she concluded, made up ‘a cloud of witnesses towards the likelihood that the English pastoral was a grim and melancholy thing’.⁴⁸ Warner’s list makes up an intriguing example of how she viewed literary and practical approaches as equally useful to the development of radical consciousness: all were perspectives to be explored over the interwar years.

Powys was another important early ally: in the twenties, he was at work transforming the insularity of Chaldon into a series of part-grave, part-comedic allegories bristling with choruses of characters, from *Mockery Gap* (1924) and *Mr Tasker’s Gods* (1925) to the more critically successful *Mr*

⁴⁵ John Lowerson, ‘Battles for the Countryside’, in *Class, Culture and Social Change: A New View of the 1930s*, ed. by Frank Gloversmith (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), pp. 258-280 (p. 261); John Richmond, ‘The Green and the Pleasant’, *Tribune* (24 December 1948), p. 19.

⁴⁶ Warner, ‘The Way by Which I have Come’, p. 17; see also Murray (pp. 426-431) for a critique of Warner’s use of Robertson Scott in *Lolly Willowses*.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 13; p. 16.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Weston's Good Wine (1927) and *Unclay* (1930). These were novels personifying God and Death in the rural village—novels filled with casual cruelties, rapes, and painful, avoidable deaths—but also about finding in the earth a ‘dim slow earth consciousness’.⁴⁹ Death, for Powys’ rural inhabitants, was a gift and a kindness, and one also found in Warner’s own interest in the potential of earth. Whilst she was not yet so explicitly placing her hopes for revolution in the soil, she was nevertheless interested in how it signalled to the history of a land. This is not the place to discuss her significant debt to Powys’ textual philosophies beyond noting her additional like attachment to memorialising beleaguered villagers, and to centring the country village. More integral to my purposes is Powys’ additional influence on Warner’s thinking about how she could inhabit a working-class village as a writer trying not to romanticise rural landscape.

For crucially, Powys was dissatisfied with the cultural capital of ‘the cottage of modern nicety’.⁵⁰ Rather than looking to live in one of Chaldon’s ‘lovely collection of long low, white-washed cottages buried in thatch’, he chose what David Garnett would describe as the village’s ‘only eyesore’: a red-brick ‘ugly’ Victorian property which he neglected to garden.⁵¹ ‘[I]f you look for sweet williams beside our door’, Powys wrote for *The Countryman*, ‘you will find only bindweed’.⁵² He summarised that ‘to act dull and untidy is an act of policy in these ungentle times’: to consciously refuse to materially poeticise the artist’s retreat with the signifiers of the cottage garden idyll made its own design rebellion.⁵³ Warner wrote later of the effects of Powys’ attempted disturbance of the “poetic” locale: as the Chaldon cobb cottages were ‘the expression in mud of the domesticity of the peasant’, so Powys’ house was ‘the

⁴⁹ Louis Wilkinson in Chris Danta, ‘The Theology of Personification: Allegory and Nonhuman Agency in the Work of T. F. Powys’, *Modernism/Modernity*, 25 (2018), 709-726 (p. 716).

⁵⁰ T. F. Powys, ‘Concerning Author’s Cottages: T. F. Powys’, in *The Countryman Book*, ed. by J. W. Robertson Scott (London: Odhams Press Limited, 1948), pp. 127-129 (p. 127).

⁵¹ Garnett in Judith Stinton’s *Chaldon Herring: Writers in a Dorset Landscape* (Norwich: Black Dog Books, 2004), p. 23.

⁵² Powys, pp. 128-129.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

expression in brick of the later Victorian middle-classes'.⁵⁴ It was neither architecturally 'theoretical' nor 'practical', she argued, but rather 'necessitarian'.⁵⁵ It was not un-ornamented, possessing some decorative brickwork and one bow-window, however such details remained 'purely necessitarian in spirit for it is necessary for the parlour to exhibit some mark of class-consciousness'.⁵⁶ However, contrary to the typical Victorian middle-class garden (and the general design mantra of Edwardian garden design) Powys' 'untidy' revolution meant that the residence was 'not tethered to the ground by any scheme of gardening'.⁵⁷ It demonstrated another way of approaching landscape; another way of drawing attention to the ways it was typically cultivated and understood. In such a context, the two variously poetic and economic approaches to landscape within *Peeping Tom* (itself dedicated to Powys) might be read as finding one solution. Could one simply refuse to cultivate the landscape at all? Tom might well have been better off if he had.

In 1926 Warner further explored the matter within *Lolly Willowes*, a novel ostensibly about personal freedom, but with much also to say on the cultivation of rural England. When the titular character decides, aged 47, to leave the London of 1921 and her respectable relations to move to Great Mop in the Chilterns ('pop 227'), she replaces familial responsibility with rural privacy. She discards the identity of Aunt Lolly to become Laura, making a pact with Satan to ensure her continued idle solitude.⁵⁸ *Lolly Willowes* has been perhaps most analysed for its allegorical posing of witchcraft as women's independence.⁵⁹ Even such readings as Murray's that plot Warner's engagement with rural reformers like Robertson Scott do so to demonstrate how the emancipated Laura has cast off 'the mental shackles of any

⁵⁴ Sylvia Townsend Warner, 'T. F. Powys and Chaldon Herring', in *With the Hunted: Selected Writings*, ed. By Peter Tolhurst (Norwich: Black Dog Books, 2012), pp. 49-65 (p. 52).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁵⁸ Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Lolly Willowes* (London: Penguin, 2020), p. 101.

⁵⁹ with Laura's conclusory soliloquy lauded predominantly for its anticipation of Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929). See Jacqueline Shin, 'Lolly Willowes and the Arts of Dispossession', *Modernism/Modernity*, 16 (2009), 709-725 (p. 709). Shin unpacks Warner's practice of 'animating' two-dimensional references within the text to consider a more subtle politics at play. Such critical persistence, she rightly argues, has a tendency to flatten out Warner's slippery text: careful attention to her loaded references offers more nuanced readings (p. 709).

religious, materialist, or political dogma’—as well as literally having the freedom and means to do as she pleases.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, close attention to Warner’s depiction of the class signifiers of the text’s gardens also reveals a meditation on the disparate values of country space.

The text brings together more of Warner’s competing perspectives. Great Mop is an insular locale composed of distinct cultural roles. It is, on one hand, a working-class village with a jostling cast of characters. To the middle-class Laura, in pursuit of rural repose, Great Mop is ideally suited to solitude: ‘never had she seen so little dropping in, leaning over fences, dawdling at the shop or in the churchyard’; it is in a landscape of strange woods stalked by Laura’s loving huntsman; and it is a village that is inhabited predominantly by Satanists—the Powys’ inspired allegorical posing by which Warner separates Laura from her prior, restrictive, respectable ways of being.⁶¹ Nevertheless, the village offers distinct characteristics to distinct characters: to Laura’s nephew Titus, it is a sum total of clichés. From Titus’ perspective, Great Mop is the ideal place to settle down and write a literary biography—it is an ‘unspoilt’ ‘example of the village community’ rife with communal activity, from cricket clubs to morris-dancing and bell-ringing.⁶² To Laura, Titus’ great threat is his simplistic relationship with the village: that he would transform Great Mop into ‘a place like any other place, a pastoral landscape where an aunt walks out with her son’; that he would homogenise its texture to find only a charmingly insincere idyll straight out of the pages of *Happy England*.⁶³ In a continued attention to the (gendered) economies of rural living, Warner further links the difference in their approaches to their ability to possess property. For Titus, the

⁶⁰ Murray suggests that Laura’s rural self-realisation offers a critique of contemporary countryside movements focusing exclusively on the material over the spiritual, critiquing the generic presentations of spinsterhood within such works as Robertson Scott’s *England’s Green & Pleasant Land: The Truth Attempted* (collected 1925)—which whilst pitted against easy rural idealisation, also relied on reductive rural character types (Murray, p. 421).

⁶¹ Warner *Lolly Willowses*, p. 83.

⁶² Warner provides a long list of available village activities: Titus passes ‘from the bar-parlour of the Lamb and Flag to the rustic woodwork of the rector’s lawn. He subscribed to the bowling green-fund, he joined the cricket club, he engaged himself to give readings at the Institute on winter evenings. He was invited to become a bell-ringer, and to read the lessons. He burgeoned for projects for Cooperative Blue Beverens, morris-dancing, performing Coriolanus with the Ancient Foresters, getting Henry Wappenshaw to come down and paint a village sign, invited Pandora Williams and her rebeck for the Barleighs flower show.’ (Ibid., p. 106).

⁶³ Ibid., p. 108.

inheritor of Laura's family home, loves the Chiltern landscape comfortably, with a 'reasonably appreciative appetite' independent of the particularity of the place.⁶⁴ It is not Laura's stranger and less definable identification with a rather more disquieting country, experienced free of constraint and "respectable" feeling; and experienced, crucially, with no chance of possession. For prior to her departure, Laura realises that her brother has lost much of her income, and her initial plans for house and 'darkening orchard' pale without difficulty. 'It is best as one grows older to strip oneself of possessions', Laura muses, 'to be almost wholly earth before one dies'.⁶⁵ Laura is to strip herself of the material signifiers of respectable middle-class existence; to live close to the land and its earthy history of living and dying. Her rural escape is not to be in a picturesquely read slum cottage, possessed and primed. It is not even to include a garden.

Laura's alternative approach is placed in contrast with the class signifiers of other country gardens. Two such gardens belong to the Willowes' residences: the now sold Old House in Dorset, and the aforementioned Lady Place, that 'small solid mansion' that made up Laura's childhood home.⁶⁶ The third is the garden surrounding the Maulgrave Folly, where Laura has her final conversation with Satan. The grey-stone Old House is nothing if not late-Victorian picturesque. It is in a landscape studded with lime, with a drive 'long, straight and formal; it had been a cart-track across a meadow when the old home was a farm'—a quick, but not insignificant reference to the farm-to-manor trajectory.⁶⁷ The Lady Place garden is marked with more high-Victorian middle-class signifiers—possessing a nut walk, 'wet rhododendrons', and a prospective rock garden.⁶⁸ The wider garden is predominantly figured through childhood games about the pond and the disused melon pit, and being tied by her brothers to the orchard's 'Bon Chrétien pear-tree': an acid reference to the adult Laura's London confinement with her elder

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 108.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 71.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 8.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 27.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 25.

brother's god-fearing family.⁶⁹ Warner's joke is, however, ironically multi-faceted. Her *Bon Chrétien* also refers to its apparent namesake, the fifteenth-century Saint Francis of Paola. As common parlance (and Isabella Beeton) would have it, 'Louis XI, king of France, had sent for Saint Francois' 'in the hopes of recovering his health through his intercession. The saint brought with him the seeds of this pear'.⁷⁰ It is likely that Warner would have been aware that the pear's name was simply successful modern marketing, and that likewise, Francis was summoned from Calabria to convert Louis XI to Christianity on his deathbed.⁷¹ Warner's multi-perspectived joke inverts the rather-more Satanic conversion to come, whilst also making visible to the myths and histories we imbue the cultivation of landscape.

Lolly's third garden, the Italianate Maulgrave Folly, offers a different (if equally flawed) way of cultivating landscape. Newly freed from Titus, Laura is walking to Great Mop when she happens upon Satan gardening. As the *Bon Chrétien* points to Warner's "Satanic" conversion, her Satanic gardener inverts Mary Magdalen's mistaking of the resurrected Jesus for a gardener. However, in another knowing twist, Warner signals the ultimate misapprehension to be on the side of the garden's design, rather than in Laura's interpretation. Warner describes Laura's approach to this strange new garden: a 'small enclosure, full of a small enclosure, full of cypresses, yews, clipped junipers and weeping-willows', a 'byronic' construction embellished with 'an assortment of minarets, gilded cupolas and obelisks' designed by Sir Ralph Maulgrave the 'Satanic Baronet'.⁷² This Italianate construction satirises a more ambiguously figured English libertarian, and another type of English garden: the lavish, Italianate garden scheme

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 26.

⁷⁰ Isabella Beeton, *The Book of Household Management* (London: S. O. Beeton, 1861), p. 792. It is safe to consider Warner knowledgeable of Beeton's writings: in a 1931 interview she would exclaim 'what a marvellous subject for biography Mrs Beeton would make!' (Sylvia Townsend Warner, 'Writers at Work', in *With the Hunted: Selected Writings*, ed. by Peter Tolhurst (Norwich: Black Dog Books, 2012), pp. 393-398 (pp. 396-397)).

⁷¹ Whilst the name of the *Bon Chrétien* does indeed allude to such an incident, it (unsurprisingly) had rather less miraculous origins: *Transactions of the Horticultural Society of London* reports in a notice from 1816 that the variety 'appears to have sprung up from seed, in the garden of Mr. Wheeler, a schoolmaster at Aldermaston in Berkshire, about twenty years ago, and was suffered to remain [...] Subsequently grafts have been extensively dispersed, and many trees are now in Mr. Williams' nursery and other gardens around London' (*Transactions of the Horticultural Society of London*, II (London: W. Nicol, 1822), p. 250).

⁷² Warner, *Lolly Willowses*, p. 148.

imposed into local countryside. Once again, she draws literary history into her reference, joining the Byronic Hero and his egoist's interventions in the natural world to her cultural commentary. As Alex Murray notes, she also includes more than a touch of the Italianate mausoleum constructed by Francis Dashwood on West Wycombe Hill in 1765.⁷³ Dashwood was a foundational member of the Knights of St Francis. Proclaiming *Fay ce que voudras* as their motto, the "Satanic knights" performed mock-catholic ceremonies in an obscenely decorated West Wycombe chapel, with pleasure their governing rule.⁷⁴ Completed with Satan, these gardens signal once more to Warner's overt cultivation of source and reference, in this case, to consider an additionally classed way of viewing the landscape. However, these "memorial" gardens also compare unfavourably with the lives memorialised in *The Espalier*, offering yet another demonstration of "respectability" and style before substance.

To Laura, Maulgrave's gardens make no apt interpretation of Satanism. 'Poor gentleman', she determines, 'how completely he misunderstood the Devil!'⁷⁵ 'For all their bad taste', the Baronet's cupolas 'were perfectly respectable'—'all had a sleek and well-cared for look'.⁷⁶ Indeed, 'the silly vain heart that lay buried there had bequeathed a sum of money for their perpetual upkeep. The Satanic Baronet who mocked at eternal life and designed this place as a lasting testament to his disbelief had contrived to immortalise himself as a laughing-stock'.⁷⁷ If we were in any doubt regarding the target of Warner's satire, her naming confirms it: the Maulgrave Folly demonstrates the folly of its maker, which is to maul about his own grave. Laura's position is confirmed in conversation. When challenged on his upkeep of the scheme, Satan replies only that 'the Council employs me to cut the bushes'.⁷⁸ His evasive

⁷³ Murray, p. 437.

⁷⁴ Also in the equally decorate caves constructed under the hill. As Michael Symes has noted, the parodic erotic iconoclasm of the gardens at West Wycombe Park were central to Dashwood's 'calculated blasphemy'—nevertheless, Warner's Folly is less definitively placed, with no nudity, and so this seems less relevant here. Symes notes also how the gardens have frequently been read as a parody of the eighteenth-century landscape gardens at Stowe. See Michael Symes, 'Flintwork, Freedom and Fantasy: The Landscape at West Wycombe Park, Buckinghamshire', *Garden History*, 33(1) (2005), 1-30 (p. 3; p. 7).

⁷⁵ Warner, *Lolly Willowses*, p. 148.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

remark is nevertheless augmented with some crucial information: ‘once a wood, always a wood’—including the Folly Woods displaced by the Maulgrave Folly, which remain, he notes, ‘particularly dense’.⁷⁹ These woods are where Satan stalks; they are none the less present despite their material absence at the hill-top. All is really always earth, Warner signals, and we should remember that.

Laura, then, is correct in her assessment of Maulgrave’s “folly”: his landscaping seems inconsequential as when the outcome is confirmed as “respectable” as the Lady Place rhododendrons. So understood, landscape signifiers have little ultimate value, and the epistemological liberation of the “Satanic mind” can also refer to Warner’s Georgic mission: to reconfigure the ways in which modern rural landscape could be interpreted, and to want to inhabit landscape differently: to cast off the trappings of class; to demonstrate that a disenfranchised rural population could find their own, independent meanings in a landscape that reflected them. In Laura’s transition from upper-middle class gentry to untethered Satanist spinster living close to the earth, we might also read a semi-autobiographical attempt at self-placing. Warner was similarly untethered in the period: a frequent visitor to Powys’ Chaldon; a member of the upper-middle class, with family-owned rural property at Little Zeal in Devon fitted with rock gardens and rhododendrons and plantings of pink Miss Jekyll and Queen Victoria Azalea.⁸⁰ This, however, was not Warner’s way—she wanted to keep close to that capacious soil, to register its turns and cultivations.⁸¹ At the close of the decade, she would begin to make her own country gardens, but also to explicitly cost up the competing cultural values of the cottage plot.

Towards More Serious Cabbages: Chaldon and *Opus 7*

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 150.

⁸⁰ Dorset History Centre [DHC], George Townsend Warner, ‘Little Zeal Garden Book’, STW.2012.125.1275, N(lower middle)/1a.

⁸¹ In any case, and like Carrington, Warner had had an exceptionally close relationship with her father, who had died suddenly in 1917, and a rather more strained one with her mother: trips to Little Zeal took on progressive difficulty. See Harman for an account of Warner’s relationship with her family.

Grow flowers, sell flowers, buy liquor—so, Amen!⁸²

In 1930, Warner purchased the ‘peculiarly dingy’ Miss Green’s cottage in Chaldon for £90, in partial recompense for Ackland losing her local accommodation.⁸³ Ackland had previously offered to sublet her Chaldon lodgings to Warner, offending her landlord in the process. In reparation, Warner intended Ackland to be Miss Green’s steward, and to herself use it as a part-time country residence. Life, however, had other plans: within months, Warner and Ackland had begun the relationship they would sustain for the remainder of their lives. Nevertheless, Warner did not cultivate a poetic locale, despite the cottage housing two enamoured poets. Like Powys’ gleeful judgements on his “ugly” redbrick dwelling, Miss Green’s, Warner described, was an unprepossessing, slate-roofed property with ‘nothing to be said in its favour except that it was totally unpicturesque and stood by itself’.⁸⁴ Like Powys, Warner relished such descriptions: in one narrative, she would even quote the surveyor’s report.⁸⁵ ‘This is a small undesirable property’, ran the judgement, ‘situated in an out of the way place and with no attractions whatsoever’.⁸⁶

Such repeated judgements proved aesthetically and politically reassuring, and suggest that as an outsider to the village, and as a practicing poet, Warner was concerned that she would displace the local working population in the making of an artist’s village. There was precedence for such behaviour in Chaldon: a cluster of artists and writers had been drawn to Powys’ earthy philosophies in the period, from Warner, Ackland and Garnett to Ottoline Morrell, Carrington, Stephen Tommy Tomlin, Llewelyn Powys, Bea Howe, and sculptor Elizabeth Muntz, amongst others.⁸⁷ Once Warner had been reassured by Powys that she would not be ‘robbing the poor of their dwellings’ (the property had not received any interest

⁸² Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Opus 7* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1931), p. 11.

⁸³ Sylvia Townsend Warner, ‘Narrative 1’, in *I’ll Stand By You: The Letters of Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland*, ed. by Susanna Pinney (London: Pimlico, 1998), pp. 5-16 (p. 9).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁸⁵ See, for instance, Warner’s ‘Concerning Author’s Cottages’ for *The Countryman*; (collected 1948, p. 136); a letter from Sylvia to Valentine dated 5 July 1930 (Dorset History Centre, Sylvia Townsend Warner, STW.2012.125.0481, N(Lower left)/34/13); Warner’s judgement is also repeated in Bea Howe’s foreword to Valentine Ackland’s autobiographical *For Sylvia* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1985), p. 5.

⁸⁶ Warner, ‘Narrative 1’, p. 10.

⁸⁷ See Judith Stinton’s *Chaldon Herring: Writers in a Dorset Landscape* (Norwich: Black Dog Books, 2004).

from prospective tenants), inhabitation could begin.⁸⁸ The garden, she wrote in the summer of 1930, was soon ‘covered with heaps of rubble and wheel-barrows reversed’—she hoped, she quipped, ‘to get the furniture in next month, and the weeds out in 1945’.⁸⁹ She found that Miss Green’s had its own monthly rose bush, and the property was to be lime washed to ‘make her look clean’, and have new railings put up.⁹⁰ The garden was also a place to put Georgic principles to life. If there was to be hot weather, she asked Ackland on the 22nd of August 1930, would the latter ‘scrabble up the lawn?’ ‘It should be a comfort’, she continued, ‘to remember that hoeing is a key Virgilian occupation; as for his 18th century tribe, they hoed everything including the ocean’.⁹¹ Literary jokes aside, Virgil remained relevant: Warner planned to follow the poet’s guidelines on transplanting trees to ensure that newly ordered fruits thrived in their new Chaldon location.

Beyond her literal applications of Georgic principles, Warner was continuing with her interest in literary cultivation. Prior to her move to Miss Green’s she had begun her most substantial verse project: *Opus 7* (1931), her ‘jog-trot couplet’ attempt ‘to do for this date what Crabbe had done for his: write a truthful pastoral’.⁹² The text was worked on in large part in London, and should be read both as a continuation of her Georgic deliberations on the forms of rural countryside, as well as in the context of her own anxieties regarding the middle-class poet’s inhabitation of a working-class country village. Set in Love Green—a suitably picturesque and partly-fictionalised Chaldon—Warner’s narrative poem offers another deliberation on twinned textual and landscape cultivations. In this case, she centres on Rebecca Random, the elderly owner of a picturesque cottage of ‘deep thatch’ bordered by half an acre of ‘old orchard ground’.⁹³ Where much of *The Espalier* offered tonally chequered satire to demonstrate the grave

⁸⁸ DHC, Sylvia Townsend Warner, STW.2012.125.0483, N(Lower left)/34/15a.

⁸⁹ Sylvia Townsend Warner to Harold Raymond, in *Sylvia Townsend Warner: Letters*, ed. by William Maxwell (London: Chatto & Windus, 1982), p. 17.

⁹⁰ DHC, Sylvia Townsend Warner, N(Lower left)/34/15a.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Warner, ‘The Way By Which I Have Come’, p. 17.

⁹³ Warner, *Opus 7*, p. 2.

situation of the rural poor, and *Lolly* an exercise in theorising alternative cultivational attitudes, *Opus* is interested in how individuals might profit from the cultural capital of the cottage plot, returning to Crabbe and literary history accordingly.

Whilst John Lucas has argued that ‘we need to knock on the head’ the ‘misleading assumption’ that the work is reminiscent of Crabbe’s, Warner nevertheless places *Opus 7* in dialogue with his goal, as first articulated in *The Village* (1784), to ‘paint’ as ‘Truth will paint and as bards will not’.⁹⁴ Crabbe was readily engaged with the critique of sentimental and misrepresentative narrative-making throughout his career, and with the role poetic traditions take in shaping cultural ideals.⁹⁵ For Kathleen Beres Rogers, his controversial refiguring of traditional forms (from the heroic couplet to the epic, the eclogue, and the country house poem) contrasts deliberately dissonant content (representations of the ‘less-than-idyllic’ situation of his contemporary poor) in a discomfiting call for social reform.⁹⁶ Beres Rogers’ argument is not dissimilar to Jacobs’ attention to *Opus*, which she reads as providing a ‘jarring, but productive disorientation’ that comes about from contrasting ‘a specific post-war historical setting with an archaic vocabulary out of kilter both with its formal debt to Clare and Crabbe and additionally in its references to’ modern Chaldon conditions.⁹⁷ Jacobs’ summary is particularly apt, demonstrating that Warner’s work should not be read as merely “reminiscent” of Crabbe, but as also positioned in separation. Warner’s references are only a jumping off point for thinking about the real-world utility of form and genre.

⁹⁴ It is not enough, Lucas suggests, to note how both employed couplets and ‘were fascinated by social outcasts’ (John Lucas, ‘Sylvia Townsend Warner as Poet’, *The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society*, 1(1) 2000, 1-16 (p. 12); George Crabbe, ‘The Village’, in *The Poetical Works of George Crabbe*, II (London: John Murray, 1831), pp. 71-106 (p. 76)).

⁹⁵ Jessica Fay, ‘George Crabbe and the Place of Amusement’, *The Review of English Studies*, 2022, 73, 746-761.

⁹⁶ Kathleen Beres Rogers, ‘Form and Deformity in George Crabbe’s *The Borough*’, *The Review of English Studies*, 73, 521-536 (p. 526).

(p. 5); See also Travis Feldman, who argues that ‘the scandalous implications of poetic content founded on social “reality” and poetic form that refused the overarching order of tidy narratives and moralistic confusions made Crabbe an especially controversial poet’. And Crabbe’s narratives were scandalous in his time, with an 1819 reviewer finding ‘so many persons literally writing under the horrors of’ his verse. Travis Feldman, ‘Controversial Crabbe: A *Namby-Pamby* Mandeville’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 51 (2012), 207-231 (p. 211; p. 209).

⁹⁷ Mary Jacobs, ‘Sylvia Townsend Warner and the Politics of the English Pastoral 1925-1934’, p. 69.

In *Opus 7*, her jumping off point appears to be Crabbe's 'industrious swain' from *The Parish Register: A Poem, in Three Parts* (1807).⁹⁸ The source of this model labourer's 'pride, his pleasure, and his gain' is his thatched cottage and accompanying garden plot, and Crabbe provides a moralising portrait of an ideal rural field labourer to contrast against 'the vice and misery' that follows.⁹⁹ Much like Peeping Tom, Crabbe's "industrious" labourer returns daily from farm-work to tend his own 'improving ground'—and unlike Peeping Tom, he succeeds, producing 'Hope, profit, pleasure' from the earth where Tom finds only weeds.¹⁰⁰ Under such a light, we might now read Warner's earlier verse as also in conversation with Crabbe, providing an alternatively pessimistic reading of the fate of this ideally industrious labourer; and a critique of Crabbe's portrait of the possibility of personal industry. In *Opus*, however, she provides a different perspective, returning to consider what the working-class villager's production of "hope", "profit" and "pleasure" might look like in the interwar garden. This protagonist is to briefly profit from her blooming cottage garden, if not for long: she too is destined for the grave. Her protagonist's "industry" is also different from Crabbe's. Rather than producing and selling apples, cherries and 'cluster'd nuts for neighbouring market stand', Rebecca sells flowers to buy gin.¹⁰¹ She is a very distinct character to Crabbe's ideal labourer, and neither is she one of Jekyll's stock figures, having more in common with the morally variable rustic cast from *The Heart of the Country*. She nevertheless capitalises on the cultural interpretation of her garden as an example of the Old English rural idyll, selling it off piece by piece. Warner's intention is celebratory rather than didactic—as Swaab argues, she creates, 'for perhaps the first time in English poetry' a 'female drunk who is not the object of pity or sociological concern'—why, Warner asks, should a poor labourer not devote themselves to personal (and even socially disreputable) pursuits?¹⁰² Nevertheless, Rebecca's desires are firmly located in the post-war village landscape, where lived experience, cultural value and historical precedent are brought together in a

⁹⁸ George Crabbe, 'The Parish Register: A Poem, in Three Parts' in *The Poetical Works of George Crabbe* (London: George Routledge, 1858), pp. 13-58 (p. 14).

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14; p. 16.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁰² Swaab, p. 76.

discordant mass. As Warner rakes over this cottage plot, its possible meanings converge and rise to the surface.

She moves quickly to set up the cultural capital of Rebecca's cottage, bringing together the simultaneous textures of the English pastoral. She begins by (mis)quoting the best part of two lines from Abraham Cowley's country house poem *The Wish* (1647): 'Ere I descend into the grave, / let me a small house and large garden have', quoth her speaker.¹⁰³ Her changes are subtle yet sly: she moves, for one, from Cowley's 'May I' to 'let me' in a gesture to the repeated requests from passing townsfolk wishing to rent a room in Rebecca's cottage.¹⁰⁴ For whilst Warner's speaker assures us that if 'Cowley could have seen' it, 'he would have cried: "tis here!'", the picturesque plot is also much-admired by twentieth-century tourists.¹⁰⁵ It possesses

large beams, small windows, all things such as glad
the hearts of those who dwell in town but would
spend weekends in the country; strangers stood
admiring it, cars stopped, Americans
levelled their cameras.¹⁰⁶

There is a nod here to the concept raised by Ford in the *Heart of the Country*: we are brought to consider the distinct perspectives of city-dwellers and travellers to those who reside in the village. To such visitors, the cottage appears an Allingham come to life: a perfect example of the English rural idyll, and Warner satirises the pursuit of the picturesque view as she does the approach of modern art. It makes for a noisy start to the poem: one bringing together a clamour of ambiguously competing interpretations stretching

¹⁰³ Warner, *Opus 7*, p. 1.

¹⁰⁴ Fittingly for Warner, the early-modern poet's wish for rural retreat begins by invoking Virgil's motif of the hive—although for Cowley, this is to damn 'the stings/ The Crowd, and Buz, and Murmurings / Of this great Hive, the City' in favour of an appropriate country living—however, Warner is not so uncomplicatedly drawn to rural ideals. See Abraham Cowley, 'The Wish', in *Poems: I. Miscellanies, II. The Mistress, or, Love Verses, III. Pindarique Odes. And IV. Davideis, or, A Sacred Poem of the Troubles of David* (London: 1656), pp. 22-23 (p. 22); Warner, *Opus 7*, p. 1.

¹⁰⁵ *Opus*, p. 1.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

from the seventeenth-century country house poem to the interwar village. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the poem, none will acquire the cottage. ‘Rebecca’, Warner’s speaker declares, ‘neither lodged nor let, nor would she hear / of sale’—even when an auctioneer offers fifty guineas.¹⁰⁷ Rebecca has a freehold, and will not let it go lightly. In any case, it was a paltry offer for such a picturesque commodity: Warner’s far less appealing residence had been bought for £90 the previous year.¹⁰⁸

Whilst the picturesque-ness of the cottage is incidental to Rebecca, her garden proves essential to maintaining her desired living. In a further nod to Powys, it possesses ‘the easiest soil’ in Love Green: ‘a mould’ ‘sweetened with ending of sweet lives untold’.¹⁰⁹ It is a soil enriched, not depleted, by past cultivations and generations; a soil, perhaps, like Ford’s, that remembers. However, there is no vegetable plot, no “miraculous” “dark objects”; and neither is it fitted with tidy herbaceous borders. And in another reference to the Country House poem, this post-war plot also does not contain flora ‘like Marvell’s, ranked in row’, ‘drilled under colours, marshalled for parade’. Instead, Rebecca’s scheme makes up a ‘more unsophisticated fusillade / loosed off, hub-bub of shape and hue and scent’—a canny recognition that, as Marvell’s militarised plot was representative of a post-campaign landscape retired to, the unstudied cottage idyll too spoke to a more twentieth-century post-war escape.¹¹⁰ Her plot invites various perspectives as it does references, questioning the absence of ‘The dues each rustic from however clenched / soil should extort—potatoes duly trenched’.¹¹¹ Various ‘mocked / to see so rich a ground so idly stocked’, she writes, making a gesture to a more socially responsible cultivation (‘were but this realm / an honest Soviet, judgment would o’erwhelm / her and her trumpery, and the freehold give / to brisker

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ To add salt to the wound, the auctioneer’s valuation—in guineas, with a predecimalisation value of £1/1 per £1—indicated that Rebecca’s cottage was intended to be purchased as luxury goods and as a material marker of cultural currency. After the 1816 introduction of the pound as the primary measure of currency, the guinea continued in circulation until the 1971 decimalisation of sterling—and maintained a certain air of prestige. So understood, the auctioneer’s valuation is doubly unrealistic: both as an understanding of the cost of Chaldon accommodation, and in its determination that Rebecca’s property should be read as a marker of cultural capital first and foremost (see Sally Mitchell, *Daily Life in Victorian England* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1996), p. 31.

¹⁰⁹ Warner, *Opus 7*, p. 2.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

hands’).¹¹² There is room here too for more shades of Crabbe: ‘Fie, fie, indeed! How wanton and perverse!’ cries her speaker; ‘Grow only flowers? —as well write only verse!’¹¹³ In Warner’s comically archaic twinning of the social utility of flowers and poetry, we are reminded of Crabbe’s literary critical note in *The Village* that ‘few, amid the rural tribe, have time / To number syllables and play with rhyme’.¹¹⁴ However, like Crabbe, Warner was nevertheless to find a poetic purpose beyond ‘barren flattery’, and Rebecca a “functional” use for flowers.¹¹⁵

Unlike Peeping Tom, Rebecca does have time for verse. Adding a sharp focus on interwar poverty to her perspectival clamour, War, Warner remarks, had ‘trod [Rebecca] low’, and ‘she on her freehold starved’. ‘Dig she could not’:

Where was the farmer who
would hire her sodden limbs when well he knew
how shapely land-girls, high-bred wenches all,
would run in breeches at his beck and call?¹¹⁶

Rebecca lives and works in what Alun Howkins has described as the agricultural “locust years” between 1921-1937. Impacted by government roll-backs, like the repeal of the Agricultural Act (1921), and the attempted abolishment of a national agricultural minimum wage by the County Wage Boards (suspended 1921-1924), farmers made significant cutbacks; a 1931 survey on Eastern arable farms indicated that labour made-up 37.3% of outgoings, which Howkins reads as inevitably influencing the statistic that 100,000 labourers left English agriculture between 1931 and 1939.¹¹⁷ Dorset had a history of particular grimness: in the mid-nineteenth century the county had possessed the lowest agricultural wages nationally

¹¹² Ibid., p. 4; p. 6.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 6.

¹¹⁴ Crabbe, ‘The Village’, p. 1; p. 2.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 2.

¹¹⁶ *Opus 7*, p. 8.

¹¹⁷ Alun Howkins, *The Death of Rural England: A Social History of the Countryside since 1900* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 65; see also Alun Howkins and Nicola Verdon, ‘The state and the farm worker: the evolution of the minimum wage in agriculture in England and Wales, 1919-1924’, *The Agricultural History Review*, 57 (2009), 257-274. After the 1921 Agricultural Wage Board repeal farmers ‘cut wages drastically. By December 1921 the average weekly wage for an ordinary labourer had dropped to 37s.; by the end of 1922 it stood at just 28s.’ (p. 270).

(around 6s. to Surrey's 14).¹¹⁸ By the turn of the century, the Dorset field labourer was paid 14s 6d; but post-war, and post Corn Production Act (1923), much local cereal production was abandoned with labour cuts to match.¹¹⁹ It was a situation Warner saw compounded by continued presence of the Women's Land Army (WLA). The WLA initially raised 30,000 volunteers with 2000 members placed on farms nationally by 1917, earning 18- 20s.: Susan Grayzel notes how the scheme was aimed particularly at 'educated, urban, thus predominantly bourgeois women who were then supposed to serve as examples for rural women in local villages'.¹²⁰ Rather than providing a moralistic presence, however, Warner reads the activities of the WLA as displacing local farmworkers. Her appraisal was informed by her own experience performing supplementary munitions war-work—the programme, she came to realise, where gentlewomen were employed to do weekend-work to relieve 'regular hands', had been a "“dilution” scheme, devised to avoid the payment of overtime rates to the regular workers'.¹²¹ The WLA also offered farmers the opportunity to dilute costs, with the higher 20s. WLA wage 10s. less than the 30s. national minimum proposed in the new Wage Board bill of 1924.¹²² In any case, Rebecca is old, unfit for manual labourer, and a woman, so would have endured even less security than male labourers of the period.¹²³ Why, indeed, would she be hired in such circumstances?

In one sense, contrasting Rebecca's floral "trumpery" with her starvation demonstrates the perversity of the continued cultural fondness for the cottage idyll, but Warner's interpretation is not so one-sided. Rather, war-time poverty provides Rebecca's justification for the planting of 'sweet flowers,

¹¹⁸ K. D. M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England 1660-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 375.

¹¹⁹ Desmond Sherry, *Socio-economic changes in some Dorset villages 1871- 1974 with reference to rural planning* (unpublished doctoral thesis, Victoria University, Manchester, 1975) p. 15; p. 26.

¹²⁰ Alun Howkins (2003), p. 31; p. 33; Susan Grayzel, 'Nostalgia, Gender and the Countryside: Placing the "Land Girl" in First World War Britain', *RH*, 10 (1999), 157-158.

¹²¹ Warner, 'The Way by Which I Have Come', p. 14; p. 15.

¹²² Proposed, but not set: As Howkins and Verdon note, the 1924 reform saw no settled upon figure for national wages (p. 270).

¹²³ See Howkins (2003).

and only flowers’, as well as prompting her business.¹²⁴ Why should she not? Warner asks, when she can take pleasure from her ‘democratic’ scheme of ‘the bond beside the free’, for weeds were welcome here, as well as ‘true clove carnation neighbouring succory, / Ishmaelite poppy with delphinium’—all grow ‘at peace together’.¹²⁵ Here too, Warner’s dialogue with Crabbe’s industrious swain feels pointed: Rebecca’s democratic garden peace, where herb meets weed meets carnation, is distinct from Crabbe’s labourer’s enclosed and carefully tended ‘fav’rite spot’ of ‘rich carnations, pinks with purple eyes’, and ‘Proud hyacinths’.¹²⁶ Crabbe’s site is also one prompting ‘Fair scenes of peace’, but this peace derives less from personal satisfaction or “democratic” planting, but rather from the plot’s more didactic presence on Sunday gatherings of good, Godfearing friends.¹²⁷ Both herbaceous schemes appear emblematic of “better” societal organisation, but Warner’s is a definitively individual perspective recognising needs that could be considered at odds with socially responsible land-management.¹²⁸ Nevertheless, Warner adds yet another perspective to the mix by demonstrating how Rebecca’s garden also appears emblematic of wider cultural rural ideals. Her first customer is a travelling ‘crippled Anzac’ offering gin across her garden gate.¹²⁹ Returning the following spring, ‘still lame’, he makes a request: ““Those flowers you call / wallflowers ... I’d like a few.” She gave him all’, receiving a crumpled pound note in recompense.¹³⁰ It is a particularly high price for something which, as Rebecca muses, ‘just blooms out by nature every spring’.¹³¹

His reasoning stems from an inherited romance about rural England. Rebecca’s Anzac is the great-grandson of a convict transported for firing ricks. This is another reference—this time, Warner’s invocation of Dorset’s long history of poverty and (attempted) revolution, herking back to the Swing riots

¹²⁴ Warner, *Opus 7*, p. 8.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹²⁶ Crabbe, ‘Parish Register’, p. 16.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹²⁸ Regardless of their differences in what that “better” might look like!

¹²⁹ Warner, *Opus 7*, p. 9.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10; p. 11.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

(1830-1833) and the 1834 transportation of the six Dorchester labourers (the Tolpuddle Martyrs) for setting up a trade union, the Friendly Society of Agricultural labourers (FSAL).¹³² Warner's Anzac remains susceptible to the pull of the English cottage garden. He had enlisted on the strength of his great-grandfather's romance, passed down from father to son—he felt 'to come to England [he would] give up all' he had—but found instead only a picturesque 'ruin' pulling 'down his soul' and a 'silly soppy landscape'. 'England', he finally confirms, 'is getting hold of me. That's why / I asked you for those flowers': after all, 'what's the use / of all this beauty and no bloody juice?'.¹³³ With no ability to get hold of a country lost, he can instead possess the flowers from the garden that point to a supposedly pre-ruin rural England. Perhaps a pound is not such a high price after all. In Warner's village plots, it becomes ever harder to pin down the shifting "worth" of garden planting, as the floral gains its own accumulating and spendable capital.

Hearsay soon leads Rebecca's garden flowers to become a commodity, at first locally, until her fame spread 'coast to coast', and she is requested 'to send flowers off by post'.¹³⁴ Her finances bloom, and Warner relays her profits through further attention to interwar cost of living. There was the price of flowers to gin: 'each violet', Rebecca envisions, crushed 'drop by drop into a glass would spill / its farthing, ha'penny, pennyworth, until / the glass brimmed to her stooping lips'.¹³⁵ Whilst the pre-war retail price of spirits was approximately 8d. per quartern, national alcohol controls saw war-time price increases (as well as strength reductions): by 1920, spirits ranged from 1s. 10½d. to 2s. 8½d. a quartern.¹³⁶ With 'no reduction in the price of gin' in sight, Rebecca pays 'twelve-and six for the bottle'—'a wicked price'.¹³⁷ So appraised, a bottle of gin cost 72 of her violets, without allowing for pricing variations. In

¹³² See Tom Scriven, 'The Dorchester Labourers and Swing's Aftermath in Dorset 1830-1838', *History Workshop Journal*, 82 (1) (2016), 1-23.

¹³³ Warner, *Opus 7*, p. 10.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹³⁶ Arthur Shadwell, *Drink in 1914-1922: a lesson in Control* (London: Longmans, 1923), p. 86.

¹³⁷ Warner, *Opus 7*, p. 12.

any case, Rebecca was a canny businesswoman, with profits boosted by low outgoings. Various flowers were appropriated from the village, ‘Uprooted in full bloom (and as some said / out of the churchyard furtively conveyed’; dead geraniums scavenged from rubbish heaps were revived; a pot lily was ‘from the farrier’s wife / cajoled’. Finally, there was the bounty of the market town Woolworth’s.¹³⁸ Here each packet ‘held a sensible hope’: and were likely all priced at the lowest of the conglomerate’s three set price points (1*d.*, 3*d.*, and 6*d.*). For sale were ‘such colours, printed bright and sleek as flames’.¹³⁹ All could be brought to profit in Rebecca’s plot.

Rebecca’s ability to cultivate such high profits from the immediate landscape (and Woolworth’s) offers another multi-perspectived joke. On one hand, Warner pokes fun at horticulturalists like Jekyll who cultivated national trade from picturesque gardens viewed emblematic of England. Like Jekyll, Rebecca scavenges from her neighbour’s gardens, and depends on her customer’s engagement with the garden idyll; however, whilst Jekyll’s nursery flourished on name-brand cultivars, Rebecca’s does from penny-packet seeds. Part of Warner’s joke is that their customers could purchase the cottage idyll for much less than they are willing to pay—as well as snidely twinning the potential expansiveness of Jekyll and Woolworth’s reach, providing an intriguing counterpoint to the new—and more accessible—ways that “rural England” could be purchased. By the beginning of World War II, Woolworth’s had opened 759 British stores, and nine more were under construction.¹⁴⁰ Like Rebecca, her customer could stock a garden in-store. As one 1937 advertisement declares, a customer could choose from fruit and rose trees to shrubs, seeds, and bulbs—‘everything’, they pose, somewhat over-ambitiously, ‘that grows’.¹⁴¹ Customers of Woolworth’s could also pick up ‘gardening tools of every description’, with ‘even bird

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁴⁰ Richard A. Hawkins, ‘The Influence of American Retailing Innovation in Britain: A Case Study of F. W. Woolworth & Co., 1909-82’, *CHARM* (2009), 118-134 (p. 123).

¹⁴¹ ‘Woolworth & Co., Ltd’, *West Bridgford Times & Echo*, 9 April 1937, p. 3; In comparison, the ‘Extra Fine Bedding Plants’ from Sutton’s Seeds were advertised from 9*d.* per dozen (Wallflowers and Cheiranthus) to 1/6 per dozen (Sweet Williams) the same year. (‘Extra Fine Bedding Plants’, *Worthing Herald*, 16 October 1937, p. 38.)

baths' 'available for a nimble sixpence'—a far cry from Mary Watts' pre-war bird baths, priced up to 12 shillings.¹⁴² And the plants were by no means poor quality. As George Orwell would later write for *Tribune*, a stock of roses he had purchased from Woolworth's in 1936 for 10s. were still blooming profusely in 1943.¹⁴³ Two years later, Orwell would return to the subject for the periodical, in response to a correspondent's insistence that roses were bourgeois. 'I still think', Orwell replied, 'that my sixpence was better spent than if it had gone on cigarettes'.¹⁴⁴ 'It is worth recording what some of them cost', he continued, 'just to show what you can do with a few shillings if you invest them in something that grows'.¹⁴⁵ Rebecca seems to prefigure Orwell's determination that individual wants are as worthy of consideration as collective responsibility, as well as considering horticultural growth a profitable investment. Nevertheless, depending so on that convergent shifting mulch of perspectives, Warner is to ultimately demonstrate the instability of Rebecca's plot and profit.

As *Opus* synthesises perspectives, it too goes through processes of generic change. Warner moves from comic to satiric to a realist attention to country conditions, but like *Lolly*, also imbues her text with its own hint of the mystic. Rebecca is considered what 'that old / West country parlance knows as "a green thumb"': to the consternation of her neighbours, she sows her seeds by lantern light.¹⁴⁶ As with Laura Willowes, this is 'less the act of a wantwit than a sorceress', although Warner is deliberately vague about the source of Rebecca's "power", much of which derives from that rich soil.¹⁴⁷ Similarly to the Satanic folk spirituality of *Lolly Willowes*, Warner's ambiguous invocation of mysticism signals her interest in alternative empirical approaches, offering a separation from rational, conservative, respectable convention; once again, she valorises the village spinster through folk tradition. Nevertheless, her

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁴³ George Orwell, 'As I Please', *Tribune*, 21 January 1944, p. 369.

¹⁴⁴ George Orwell, 'A Good Word for the Vicar of Bray', *Tribune*, 26 April 1946, pp. 7-8 (pp. 7-8).

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8. See Rebecca Solnit, *Orwell's Roses* (London: Granta, 2021), for further discussion on Orwell's gardens (and roses!).

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

fantastical inclusions possess an additional consequence: her generic slippage further ironises any conclusive attempt to pin down the shifting capital of the village garden. Despite Warner's narrative grounding in a local, accurately costed post-war situation, Rebecca's success only really comes about because of mystic powers out of reach of the everyman: it is quite literally a fantastic outcome. Not only does the picturesque ideal offer a perverse misreading of interwar rural economies, but it can be considered an exercise in wish-fulfilment. Her success, then, does not last. Her trade continues until the winter burial of villager Bet Murley, and until the last of Rebecca's yearly flowers have adorned the grave. Returning from the purchase of four bottles of gin, Rebecca decides to 'look / once more upon her flowers' and show them their value.¹⁴⁸ Unfortunately, they have gone (their purchaser, ironically, wanted to get their money's worth). Rebecca remains, to drink her loss and a 'doleful' Bet speaks back from the earth to remind Rebecca of the misery of living.¹⁴⁹ The exchange prompts her final act, and she rhapsodically drains her gin—her garden's worth—and dies.

Rebecca's suicide should not be read as a comeuppance but a small triumph. She may have drawn from the cottage idyll enough profit to sustain pleasure through gin, but facing another winter with only four bottles for company, she decides to opt out. Even the fantastic elements of her horticultural talent cannot subvert the seasons, after all. What was the landscape without "bloody juice"? Warner makes an intriguing ending: Rebecca's death is not a moralistic lesson to caution against immoral living. Instead, it registers the grave situation of the interwar rural poor, and the ultimate insubstantiality of the cottage garden idyll, despite Rebecca's temporary profit. Returning to Crabbe's industrious swain, we might finally note that Warner's "productive" field-labourer might have found hope, pleasure, and profit, but they were nevertheless destined for an early grave.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 44-45.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 48.

Once stationed in Chaldon, the mixed perspectives of *Opus 7* was mirrored by her everyday experiences. The landscape offered many private pleasures: June hay-cutting, she wrote to Garnett, was ‘exquisite’, and the fields were ‘so full of flowers that in the evenings they smell exactly like the breath of cows’.¹⁵⁰ However, outside of personal revelation she was pulled towards communal responsibility, and she moved to emphasise the practical and the non-picturesque aspects of village living above all. For *The Countryman*, she would summarise Miss Green’s without any attention to the property’s appearance: that it would let ‘unfurnished, at the usual local rental of 2s. to 2s. 6d. a week’ (less than a third of the price of a bottle of Rebecca’s gin); summarising the necessities of managing water access and basic cottage modifications; and suggesting the proper productive planting of vegetables, rather than flowers, in the cottage garden.¹⁵¹ In 1932, Warner returned to Love Green for a non-fictional account of Chaldon that bypassed Miss Green’s entirely. There are no cottage gardens in this narrative. Love Green ‘is an agricultural village’, Warner writes, and

being an agricultural village, it is a poor one. Year by year husbandry decays, and the large squares and oblongs of arable that look like carpets tightly stretched upon the contours of the downs show by their colour the invasion of thistles and sorrel and resurgence of flint.¹⁵²

Whilst Warner may have previously demonstrated a poetic interest in the value of weeds, in the later Love Green, they have a social and agricultural cost that is immediately visible in the landscape. Her glance over the village’s appearance is emphatic: serving to visualise a tightly stretched interwar community. Where thatch appears, it is ‘threadbare’—the scene is dominated by barns rising ‘stone-built and massive’ instead.¹⁵³ There is no Cowley to laud picturesque appearance, and there is no capitalisation—personal or cultural—on the cottage idyll. Instead, ‘Water’, Warner summarises, ‘has to

¹⁵⁰ Sylvia Townsend Warner to David Garnett, 22 June 1932, in *Sylvia Townsend Warner: Letters*, ed. by William Maxwell (London: Chatto & Windus, 1982), pp. 20-22 (p. 22).

¹⁵¹ Sylvia Townsend Warner, ‘Concerning Author’s Cottages – Sylvia Townsend Warner’, p. 136.

¹⁵² Sylvia Townsend Warner, ‘Love Green’, in *With the Hunted: Selected Writings*, ed. By Peter Tolhurst (Norwich: Black Dog Books, 2012) pp. 302-309 (p. 302).

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 302.

be caught from the roof gutters or pulled from wells liable to contamination; the cottages are small and inconvenient, some barely weatherproof, and infested with vermin. These conditions are accepted without a murmur'.¹⁵⁴ Flowers publicly abandoned, the shift in focus between the private and public representations of her inhabitation of rural Dorset registers soon-to-burgeon political commitments. However, despite these new commitments, her private deliberations on landscape continued throughout the thirties. As she progressed towards the revolutionary ground of 1939, she was to attempt to cultivate far more "poetic" locales than Chaldon.

Soil: Towards the Revolutionary Georgic

The house was sheltered by them, but the sun bathed it, and seemed to have ripened it [...] In front of it was a stretch of soft dense lawn, which had never been mown except for with a scythe. Our lease stipulated that this should continue.¹⁵⁵

The unpicturesque Miss Green's was too small for long-term cohabitation, and Warner and Ackland began to look beyond Dorset. In June 1933, they signed a year's lease for the Norfolk Frankfort Manor: a seventeenth-century property leased for £50 a year on the proviso that they 'would get the garden back in order'.¹⁵⁶ It was, Warner noted at the time, rather 'a mouldering grange', however, when looking back in later life she would dwell instead on its 'reed-thatch roof' and that it was 'filled with the noise of trees'.¹⁵⁷ Frankfort was a much larger project: three acres including a one-acre walled garden 'smothered in bindweed', an orchard and paddocks, a dilapidated vinery, a stable, looseboxes and harness room,

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

¹⁵⁵ Sylvia Townsend Warner, 'Narrative 5', in *I'll Stand by You: The Letters of Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland*, ed. by Susanna Pinney (London: Pimlico, 1998), 112-116 (pp. 112-113).

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

¹⁵⁷ Warner to Raymond, 17 June 1933, in *Sylvia Townsend Warner: Letters*, ed. by William Maxwell (London: Chatto & Windus, 1982) pp. 23-24 (p. 23); Warner, 'Narrative 5', p. 112.

alongside a coach house, further sheds and pigsties.¹⁵⁸ Within the orchard was ‘a vast leaning pear-tree, its limbs propped on crutches’—‘I looked for it in Evelyn’s *Compleat Gardener*’, she continued.¹⁵⁹ Despite her continued insistence on the unpicturesque-ness of Miss Green’s, Warner’s later reminiscences romanticise the historicity of Frankfort’s grounds, completed with arboreal inhabitants deserving of an imagined lineage. This pear tree was something stranger than the *Bon Chrétien*—an older thing that appeared emblematic of centuries of twinned literary and landscape history.

Written after Ackland’s 1969 death, these reminiscences provide a distinct perspective on the inhabitation of the country house, and yet it was one that appears separated from their progressive political concerns. In 1933, Warner was also growing concerned with the rise of European fascism. Hitler’s swearing in, the Reichstag Fire and accompanying trial, the Nazi party’s appropriation of the fire as proof of the danger of communism, and wider reports of Nazi brutality were widely reported in the press, discussed with Ackland and Powys, and prompted anti-fascist demonstration.¹⁶⁰ Such concerns are strangely absent from her 1969 reminiscences. We could suggest that this absence relates to softening political allegiances later in life, or a wish to solely remember the places lived in with a much-missed partner, yet the truth appears more complex. Warner’s narrative was based on private papers from the period, and such sources provide a biographical counterpoint to her continuing Georgic interrogations, and her move towards Marxism. As in text, and as she moved with Ackland between Frankfort, back to Chaldon, and on to Frome Vauchurch, her garden plots continue to register her mediations on the shifting costs and profits of cultivating landscape.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

¹⁶⁰ As she later summarised, ‘what influenced almost all the people of my generation more than anything was the Reichstag fire trial [...] And that was very well reported in *The Times* and made me feel very interested in ordinary politics. And that of course made me immediately interested in the doings of the Black Shirts, and *that’s* how I came to meet the people in *Left Review* and eventually do some writing’ (Sylvia Townsend Warner in Val Warner and Michael Schmidt, ‘Sylvia Townsend Warner in Conversation’, *The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society*, 3 (2020), 43-52 (p. 35).

Dwindling book royalties required Ackland and Warner to economise to afford Frankfort's lease, and their extended plot meant hiring staff: a charwoman for the house, and a gardener to do the scything. Consequently, like Ford, they turned to the kitchen garden for sustenance. Much of the plot had been put to potatoes: these were sold 'to a fish and chip on the Norwich road'.¹⁶¹ They made 'jams and pickles and preserves and sold them' for 2/6; alongside rhubarb chutney, apple chutney (both 2s.), pickled nasturtium seeds (1/6) and 'lemon scented verbena sachets' (1s.).¹⁶² Beyond Warner's (unprofitable) creations, they also sold vegetable produce when they could ('try as I will, and live as we do on vegetables, I can't keep within my estimate', Warner had written that August). By July 1st, 1934, they were unearthing 8lbs new potatoes at 9lbs, 'for sale @ 2d lb'.¹⁶³ To maximise productive efficiency, the pair made careful records: precisely delineating the location and varieties of produce; dates of planting, substantial growth and picking; weights collected; hours spent labouring; and tasks performed.¹⁶⁴ As Warner noted on March 15th, 1934: 'dug in plum-bed. Sowed leaks [*sic*] in cage-bed'.¹⁶⁵ Such notations continue throughout their time at Frankfort, with Ackland taking over primary scribe duties. On the evening of June 4th came a typical entry: they did, as Ackland notes,

each 2 hours work: Sylvia continued weeding of strawberry cage; I carried 22 gallons of water in relays – watering 6 rows of peas; 2 rows of carrots; 5 rows of lettuces [...] 2 rows of maize; 2 rows of kidney beans. Also, I hoed the patio between the raspberries & the fruit trees.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ Warner, 'Narrative 5', p. 115

¹⁶² 'Christmas 1933 is imminent', declared a notice in the Sloley post office window, 'Send your friends a carton of / home-made CHESTNUT JAM. An epicurean jam'. See Harman, p. 131.

¹⁶³ DHC, Valentine Ackland, '1 July 1934', in Valentine Ackland and Sylvia Townsend Warner, *A Gardening Note-book*, STW.2012.125.0677, J(FL)/3.

¹⁶⁴ Garden locations included the cage-bed, the plum-tree bed, the wall-border, the back-of-the-wall border, the new border, the left and right espalier borders. Outside lay the yard bed, the honey-suckle borders, the house-borders, the drive border, nursery bed, and meadow borders. See DHC, Sylvia Townsend Warner, 'Frankfort Manor', in Valentine Ackland and Sylvia Townsend Warner, 'A Gardening Note-book', (J(FL)/3).

¹⁶⁵ DHC, Note-book, 15 March 1934.

¹⁶⁶ DHC, Valentine Ackland, 'Notebook', 15 June 1934.

That June, she calculated that the pair had worked ‘101 ½ hours in the garden—a step up from the 77 of May.’¹⁶⁷

Warner and Ackland’s focus on the economic aspects of country house life partially reconfigures the cultural idea of “doing-up” a more-or-less shabby historic property.¹⁶⁸ As a seventeenth-century property leased on the condition of a suitable transformation of the garden, Frankfort would have made an ideal Arts and Crafts garden project, or site ripe for poetic repose. The grounds even required the then antiquated use of a scythe for lawn-cutting, an inefficient activity couched in literary tradition. Accordingly, whilst they remained committed to economic grounds management, such considerations suggest that they had moved further from Powys’ untidy garden revolution to participate in some part in the cultivation of the historic signifiers of the country house. It might appear a curious choice for two communists. However, taking up Frankfort felt more appropriate for their class and occupation than their inhabitation of a labourer’s cottage, which had continued to provide anxiety. And Ackland had a frustrated inheritance to contend with, thirty minutes from Frankfort at the Hill-House at Winterton-on-sea, where she had grown up. ‘[A]gainst all reason’, Warner wrote, ‘it was believed she would inherit the place, rule there, and restore a former state of things’: and ‘there was still so much worth saving—a traditional amplitude, a Victorian solidity and compactness’, albeit one blurred by a decade of neglect in the years since her father’s passing.¹⁶⁹ Unfortunately, it was not to be. As Warner remembered,

what I saw as a stanza in the interminable English poem of ‘The Triumph of Time’, she saw with practical censoriousness [...] the enormous rusted roller which used to be pulled over the lawn by a pony wearing boots [...] the tattering reed-fence which had been so tight against the wind, the

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 30 June 1934; 31 May 1934.

¹⁶⁸ Such an attention was continued inside: as Warner wryly noted to Llewelyn Powys in 1934, despite being furnished to their satisfaction, when she saw ‘strangers looking rather wistfully round the very large hall, it [occurred to her] that perhaps one horsehair sofa, two chairs, a bust and two guns is not quite all the furniture they expect’ (Warner to Powys, quoted in Warner’s ‘Narrative 5’, p. 113).

¹⁶⁹ Sylvia Townsend Warner, ‘Narrative 4’, in *I’ll Stand by You: The Letters of Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland*, ed. by Susanna Pinney (London: Pimlico, 1998), pp. 92-95 (p. 93).

well under the lilac bushes, the ash tree where she sat writing poems and hid them in the crevices. ‘No chance of a poem now’, she said.¹⁷⁰

Warner’s narrative introduces an additional counterpoint to her interest in the inhabitation of country property. Ackland is credited with a determinedly practical role, where Warner remains intrigued by the poetic contexts suggested by (worse-for-wear) historic buildings and their accompanying grounds. Her anecdote somewhat demarcates their approach to landscape: for Warner, so engaged in literary history and in reference-making, the signifiers of mis-use provide an apt source for poetic meditation. However, for Ackland, the only one with an intimate familiarity with the place, these same markers only signal lost opportunity—frustrated inheritance, an estate poorly managed, time lost. For Ackland, this garden’s time for poetry is over. Warner makes a return to the cultivational perspectives of *The Espalier*: here, they are brought to life as the two deliberate on the value of poetry and its relationship to landscape. This dynamic informs their approach to the Frankfort tenure, which offered another small country house to tend, and perhaps even poetry—a property isolated from Chaldon poverty, where they could explore a more manorial role.

In deference to the continued pull of the poetic, a floral narrative emerges amongst Warner and Ackland’s entries on vegetable production. Between broad bean sowing, sweet peas were planted in the yard bed (January 3rd, 1934); on January 9th, several roses come into flower.¹⁷¹ In February, they planted nasturtiums round the roots of their espalier fruit trees; ‘snowdrops, aconites, crocuses, laurustinus, catkins’ and jessamine were already in flower; and it was time to set wallflowers and polyanthus.¹⁷² Between the 20th and the 22nd they prepared to plant anemones in the drive border, and there were now ‘masses of snowdrops and aconites’—with the crocuses now numbering 83.¹⁷³ March saw more flora still:

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 94.

¹⁷¹ DHC, Warner, ‘Note-book, 8-9 January 1934.

¹⁷² Ibid., February 1934.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 20-22 February 1934.

by the first of the month, the apricot was in bloom; by the third, a ‘Spanish iris out’.¹⁷⁴ Soon came two days of transporting hollies to the orchard hedge and one of pruning and arranging roses on decorative arches in the kitchen garden. The wallflowers had now bloomed, along with violets and primroses.¹⁷⁵ Such plantings, Warner argued, felt ‘propitious’—and they were also emblematic of the contentment shared in the Frankfort grounds.¹⁷⁶ ‘I remember’, Warner wrote, ‘hanging grey kittens’ among the ‘lolloping pink roses’ of the decorative arch ‘to get them out of my way as I thinned carrots, and thinking as I heard Valentine whistling nearby: ‘It would not be possible to know greater happiness’.¹⁷⁷ It was not to last.

Despite their shared attention to the economies of landscape, their finances continued to worsen, in large part due to their involvement in a libel suit, and their being saddled with further unaffordable costs. In September 1934 they left, moving into 24 West Chaldon. This cottage faced the ‘untrammelled solitude of the downs’, but it also had no lighting, no sanitation, no damp-course, and eight dead rats were dredged from the well’.¹⁷⁸ They were back to reality, and correspondingly, whilst the Garden Notebook offers a portrait of their West Chaldon cultivations, it is markedly less comprehensive. A March 1935 seed order is costed up to 10s. 9d. of vegetables; two days later sees the appropriation of herbs and shrubs from Miss Green’s and the setting of raspberry canes from Frankfort.¹⁷⁹ Finally, snowdrops, winter jessamine, violets and periwinkles are seen to emerge in January 1936. One explanation for this notational

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 3 March 1934.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 12 March 1934; 14 March 1934; 7 March 1934.

¹⁷⁶ Warner, ‘Narrative 5’, p. 115.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 115.

¹⁷⁸ Sylvia Townsend Warner, ‘Narrative 7’, in *I’ll Stand by You: The Letters of Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland*, ed. by Susanna Pinney (London: Pimlico, 1998), pp. 155-157 (p. 156); it was also too hot and stuffy for sleep in summer, and so in 1935 the pair purchased a small second-hand caravan instead—leaky air mattresses made some improvement, despite their new neighbours being some overly-interested cattle. As Warner wrote to Julius Lipton, ‘if it weren’t for the fact that the second-hand air-mattresses leak, and have to be reblown up at intervals of every two hours or so, I could describe it as very restful and refreshing’—the neighbouring cattle had determined that ‘the caravan had been put there on purpose for them to scratch themselves against, and, my god! didn’t they scratch’. Barbed wire aided the latter situation. Warner, to Julius Lipton, 28 July 1935, in *Sylvia Townsend Warner: Letters*, ed. by William Maxwell (London: Chatto & Windus, 1982), p. 35.

¹⁷⁹ Including two varieties of peas, beans and broccoli, carrots, leeks, lettuces, maize, parsnips, radishes and marrow. DHC, Valentine Ackland, Note-book, 7 March 1935.

scarcity is Ackland's transition to a second 'Naturalist's' notebook dedicated to local landscape: here, brief records spot the early months of 1935 and 1936, and cottage flowers appear in the April garden, despite weather conditions having left 'everything half-drowned, except the weeds'.¹⁸⁰ From May 1936 onwards, until their move to Frome Vauchurch in August 1937, notations disappear from both books entirely.

This change in focus maps on to the ramping up of political commitments. Warner wrote for *Tribune* and debated narrative in ideal socialist fiction for *The Left Review*. Her interest in the real contexts and practical functions of literary genre was retrofitted to consider the formal construction of more explicitly propagandist literature. 'Unless the form of a story is discussed in relation to the content', she posed for *The Left Review*,

we are discussing the literature apart from its practical intention in actual life; and that practical intention is the final essence of everything we say, however abstract the form.¹⁸¹

In January 1935 she had demonstrated her point, exploding the English pastoral in 'In the Midwinter': as Ewins describes, idyllic "shepherds" and "pregnant ewes" are blasted by an accidental "poison-gas bomb".¹⁸² In recognition of continued Chaldon poverty, she and Ackland campaigned for communism across Dorset, leading the local Left Book Club, speaking at rallies, taking part in anti-fascist demonstrations, organising local Labour meetings, and ferrying villagers to vote.¹⁸³ There was less room for deliberation on the appearances of village life, either publicly or privately: 'those pretty cottages you saw at West Chaldon', she noted dryly to a correspondent in 1935, 'have just had a foot of filthy water in

¹⁸⁰ DHC, Valentine Ackland, A Naturalist's Notebook, 25 April 1936, STW.2012.125.1921, J(FL)/3.

¹⁸¹ Warner in Ewins, p. 662.

¹⁸² Ewins; Warner in Ewins, p. 662.

¹⁸³ As Warner wrote of one instance, 'Nothing but our M.G. Valentine did over a hundred miles, taking voters in ones, and just when we thought we had finished the people we knew, we heard of a whole new settlement, bungalows on the heath near Wool' Warner, to Julius Lipton, 28 September 1935, in *Sylvia Townsend Warner: Letters*, edited by William Maxwell (London: Chatto & Windus, 1982), pp. 36-37 (p. 36).

them, because the farmer didn't clear out that stinking ditch'.¹⁸⁴ It was time for collective action above all: in 1936, they devoted efforts to the Spanish Civil War, working for a Barcelonan Red Cross Unit. And yet the English landscape had not disappeared from the picture. 1936 also saw the publication of the historical fiction *Summer Will Show*—Warner's most extensive socialist work to date, and one that worked to transfigure the previous years' shifting attention to landscape into a revolutionary Georgic. This novel would again counterpoint a range of literary and biographical perspectives, now providing in a semi-autobiographical narrative about a twinned movement towards radical politics, and towards a radical approach to landscape.

Drafted throughout the tenancies at Frankfort and West Chaldon, *Summer Will Show* transitions the garden to a revolutionary space. The text follows Sophia Willoughby, the wealthy landowner of the Dorset Blandamer House estate. After the death of her two children from smallpox, Sophia journeys to the Parisian barricades of 1848, to sapphism, and finally to communism. Warner's text is predominantly analysed for its interrogation of the role of narrative in the development of paralleled political and sexual awakenings, and for how despite the novel culminating in Sophia's reading of *The Communist Manifesto*, Warner continues an attention to aesthetic and social concerns.¹⁸⁵ Whilst the bulk of the narrative considers revolutionary Paris, Warner's cityscapes—and her representation of Sophia's political awakening—are framed against the English country estate. Reading the gardens of *Summer Will Show*—from the Dorset Blandamer grounds, to the Parisian, revolution-adjacent Luxembourg Gardens and *Jardin des Plantes*, and on to the promise of a Normandy smallholding, reveals the final development of Warner's interwar Georgic.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 37.

¹⁸⁵ Her attention to historical setting—her consideration of the continued relevance of the February and June 1848 revolutions to twentieth-century socialism—and her nuanced narrativisation of the interrelated contributions of class, gender and sexuality to the social self, complicate the text's reception as solely belonging to either a 'programmatic socialist realist' or modernist experimental camp. Ewins, p. 665; see also see Thomas Foster, "'Dream Made Flesh": Sexual Difference and Narratives of Revolution in Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Summer Will Show*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 41 (1995), 532-353 (p. 533).

Warner begins at Blandamer, a site placed in conversation with her previous textual gardens. This landscape has its own gardened class-signifiers—like the Willows’ Old House, possessing a long lime drive, although Blandamer is a grander prospect, with ‘smooth striped’ lawns and lake with boathouse.¹⁸⁶ Warner quickly counterpoints the estate with working Dorset: in reminiscence of Love Green, this land ‘was poor, its bones showed through, its long history of seed-time and harvest had starved it’; flint glitters in the sun, and labourers work like mechanised ‘automatons’ in the heat, pausing only when ‘writhing powerless with colic’.¹⁸⁷ Despite such contrasts, Sophia’s concern is the improvement of her estate. She muses on ‘further plantations, an improved breed of cows at the home farm, the lake dredged and a walk of mown grass and willow trees carried round it [...] and a more respectable tenantry’.¹⁸⁸ It is a pleasure to consider herself ‘a more vigorous or better-trained animal’ than any produced at her stables and sheepfolds and kennels.¹⁸⁹ Sophia’s efficient grounds management and commitment to animal husbandry provide a precarious characterisation of the landscaped expectations of wealth and status: and one based in Georgic literary tradition. Warner confirms these expectations to be outwardly fulfilled by an appropriate attention to both the aesthetics and practicalities of estate life. Soon, however, she offers a differently politicised Georgic. Despite the pretence of security materialised by the ‘little fountains’ that splash in the grounds, Sophia’s children catch and die from smallpox.¹⁹⁰ Maternal responsibility lost, she trades the cultivation of her estate and any marital rights to its possession for Paris, revolution, and Minna, her estranged husband’s mistress.

¹⁸⁶ Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Summer Will Show* (London: Penguin, 2020), p. 33. Warner even nods to *Lolly*’s commentary on graveside cultivation with a wry judgement of the planting of Sophia’s Mamma’s tomb as ‘silly and sentimental’. Suitably befitting of her mother’s romantic character, an overhanging weeping willow perennially stains the tomb’s white marble, and requires repeated scrubbing—a sardonic reference to Sophia’s ‘slow and rigid’ attitude to maintaining her respectability (p. 15).

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5; p. 4.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

Despite her move to turbulent cityscape, Warner continues to deliberate upon the function of gardens, which frequently appear at crucial moments in the development of Sophia's radicalisation. Here, Warner's Georgic pairings are between rural production and revolutionary action. Sophia's introduction to French political unrest arrives with her observation of quayside graffiti, and a worker's sketching of *Les Poires*: a subversive caricature of Louis Phillippe as pear that entertained collective notoriety from the 1830s to the king's 1848 abdication.¹⁹¹ Sophia watches as the artist draws 'a tree, a fruit-tree, a pear-tree, since its bore on every branch an enormous swelling pear. Then he drew a man, a peasant, holding a pruning knife'.¹⁹² Her quick clauses structure Sophia's progressive understanding of the caricature (and its revolutionary intention) up to her recognition: they were 'unmistakably of the cast of the Royal family'.¹⁹³ Her reference polyphonically registers both Warner's commitments to a realist attention to populist revolutionary media, and her continued attention to Georgic motif. Beyond her attention to the real cultural relevance of a rebellious Georgic, her invocation of *Le Poire*—pear, king, and fool—stands in conversation with the *Bon Chrétien* of *Lolly Willowes*. Where the *Chrétien* ironically prefigures Laura's personal emancipation, *Le Poire* signals instead a more collective upheaval. It was time for revolution, argues Warner, and whilst that revolution might appear to be placed within new, international contexts, it nevertheless appropriated far more familiar ones.

Such pairings continue in earnest: open fire at the barricades remind Sophia of 'the tawny bulk of English woodlands' and 'the Virgilian romance' of the landscape of pheasant shooting.¹⁹⁴ A life 'nourished', Warner continues, 'in that pure leaf-mould of land-owning' 'does not easily let go its hold'—instead, Sophia's inherited landowning ideals are brought into dialogue with her new surroundings, with intriguing results.¹⁹⁵ Each polyphonic clash brings her further towards a revolutionary mindset, as the

¹⁹¹ For a full account of the impact of *Les Poires* in nineteenth-century French culture, see Sandy Petrey, *In the Court of the Pear King: French Culture and the Rise of Realism* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2005),

¹⁹² Warner, *Summer Will Show*, p. 47.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

Parisian gardens provide repeated recontextualisation. When Louis Phillipe abdicates the following day, he does so ‘hastening through the gardens of the Tuileries’, and the landscape of the new French republic progressively interferes with Sophia’s ways of being.¹⁹⁶ In one episode, determined to provide financial support to a starving Minna, she follows her into the Luxembourg gardens: the surroundings inappropriately poeticise her efforts. ‘[T]o accost her under these trees, and within the spell of the fountain’s melancholy voice, would have been too elegiac’ she muses.¹⁹⁷ Minna re-gifts Sophia’s offering—the sum of her accessible wealth—to the revolutionary cause instead. This act marks a turning point for Sophia. Despite her earlier rejection of the elegiac qualities of landscaping, the awakening of her political consciousness is nevertheless narrated through such images. ‘[I]t was as though through the floor of the Luxembourg Palace Sophia had seen a fountain spring up’, Warner writes, ‘a moment before unsuspected and now to play for ever’.¹⁹⁸ Both inherited landscapes and their poetic vocabulary could be appropriated, and new, radical contexts imposed. A little later, atop the ‘dirty grass’ of an untidy hillock at the *Jardin des Plantes*, she reaches a further progression: a complacency regarding the garden’s scruffy appearance so-far ‘alien to her character’.¹⁹⁹ Counterpointing her foundational attitude to Blandamer, she now wishes ‘no comparison between the desired and the actual’ and ‘no busybody ideal [to] suggest improvements’.²⁰⁰ Such a revelation informs a final movement. Considering money-making schemes to finance a modest living for herself and Minna, Sophia secretly plans to appropriate and pawn her diamonds. On recognition of her internal scheming, Minna assesses that the aristocrat looks ‘exactly’ as if she ‘had been robbing an orchard’.²⁰¹ Warner’s pairing of orchard fruits and marital jewels slyly repositions the liberated Sophia amongst the revolutionary French. As the workers fell *Les Poires*, Sophia plans to re-appropriate her marital orchard.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 131.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 159.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 162.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 173.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 173.

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 176.

The text's final landscape reappraisals occur towards novel's end. Prior to the bloody June rebellion, and nearing starvation, Minna inherits a modest smallholding in Rouen. The property promises a romantic escape from social responsibility, and one negotiated from multiple perspectives. Sophia, Minna, and Wlodomir, a member of Minna's revolutionary set, imagine the possibilities: 'they were all', Warner wryly nods, 'picking buttercups and daisies and making cream cheeses'; arguing over willows and poplars; and in Sophia's case (the only one with any experience in estate management), considering the likely need for the re-roofing of the pigsties.²⁰² The revolutionary set, Warner signals, are not immune to the 'beautiful dream' of the country idyll: Sophia alone, now collecting scrap metal for the communist cause, offers a nuanced appraisal of the disparate approaches towards the small-holding ('a few injudicious warblings on the beauties of nature to a tenant-farmer might set back the rent for a quarter', she considers).²⁰³ Minna's romantic imagination of the fruits of rural production are undercut by Sophia's understanding of country conditions, informed by Warner's reading of twentieth-century poverty: both misrepresentative and an impediment to efficiency. Nevertheless, the dream is to remain just that. The likelihood of a rural counter-revolution, prompted by the economic sanctions placed upon the working-classes during the interim 1848 liberal government, imperils the leftist lovers' possible safety. In any case, the revolution lay in Paris. Dream abandoned, and signalled as an illusory distraction whatever the approach, Warner's text hurries to its conclusion: the June Days uprising; 10,000 wounded or dead; the end of the French hope for a Democratic and Social Republic; and the circulation of *The Communist Manifesto*. The text's final gardens appear in the report that 'four hundred criminals' were now being 'shot daily in the Luxembourg gardens'.²⁰⁴

Interpreting gardens as integral to Sophia's radicalism permits us to also consider how the novel narrates a progression not dissimilar to Warner's own. It also demonstrates how Warner's time spent in-

²⁰² Ibid., p. 243.

²⁰³ Ibid., p. 262.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 307.

garden impacted her interpretation of effective land management. The movements of Warner's narratives, and her deliberations between distinctly romantic and practical small-holding dreams can be mapped onto her and Ackland's thirties movements between rural gardens. Parallels emerge between time spent at Frankfort and Chaldon, and between Sophia's journeying from Blandamer to Paris. The contrasts between the characterisation of Blandamer and its Dorset surroundings, whilst emblematic of the impacts of the class divide on landscape, also suggest the renewed political realism encouraged by Warner and Ackland's return to Chaldon squalor. Blandamer is expertly managed through relentless practicality as the pair attempted to make Frankfort pay through a close attention to the worth of their garden: both prove unsubstantial, albeit for different reasons. Beyond a demonstration that the efficient management of the landowner's estate does not entail the efficient management of the poverty-wrecked countryside, Blandamer offers a simplified presentation of one ideal that Ackland and Warner had flirted with at Frankfort. Warner suggests that the efficient management of one's estate can prove insufficient, when one is confronted with the economic contexts of its running, when one is precariously positioned, and when one has external social obligations. Correspondingly, the Rouen smallholding becomes emblematic of the idyllic seduction of the retreat from collectivist responsibility at Frankfort; and of Warner and Ackland's new turn to organising in Chaldon in response to European fascism. Frankfort's pear tree need disappear, at least for the moment, its fruits publicly shewn off as *Les Poires*.

As the 1848 revolution ultimately ended in the overriding of revolutionary dreams, Warner and Ackland's thirties attention to anti-fascism was also frustrated by contemporary politics. Warner continued to emphasise that revolution should occur in the Dorset garden, and that politics remained part of her life. In 1937, she advised the North Dorset labour Party to view the Spanish Civil War as a class dispute, and intervene appropriately; in 1938, she and Ackland sent a reader's protest to the *Daily News*, explicitly from Dorset ('we do not all applaud Mr. Chamberlain', they state, on the Munich Agreement); in the 1939 *Tribune*, contributions for Spanish Civil War relief 'were to be sent to Sylvia Townsend

Warner, Frome Vauchurch'.²⁰⁵ Warner's literary career was used to promote attendance at the local Left Book Club—an additional value for her Georgic cultivations.²⁰⁶ In July, her deliberation on her progression towards the polyphonic value of a 'plot of earth, clean, and well dug, and raked fine' was published.²⁰⁷ The village garden, she determined, offered a way into international politics that went beyond theory, and was explicitly concerned with praxis.

In her progression towards the revolutionary Georgic, Warner's texts move through a satirical presentation of rural conditions through a deliberation on the cultural capital of cultivated landscape, up to her thirties recognition that writing about the flowers of her village gardens—at least publicly—could contribute to the continuation of the poetic trends she railed against. The absence of her cottage gardens from these writings demonstrates her want to focus in on those more serious cabbages without distraction—to raking her soil fine—and her tending of twinned real and literary ground in the hope of reform. Accordingly, Warner's textual gardens progressively render her anxieties regarding squaring up her plots with her real-life commitments to political change. Through the thirties, Warner progressively publicises a more straightforward judgement on the cultural capital of cultivated landscapes, whilst her own herbaceous borders flowered on. The impact of cultivating rural landscapes is evident in her texts from her preparation to move to Dorset: whilst *Opus* offers a multi-perspectived attention to her anxieties regarding inhabiting a "picturesque" locale, within a year, her written commentary on the Chaldon landscape was most concerned with economic hardship. However, her continued adaption of Georgic convention also demonstrates her belief that writers should reappropriate tools inherited from literary history, and that socialist writing should not be divorced from the traditions of literary innovation that preceded them. Life, after-all, was messy; cultural understandings of landscape deeply embedded; personal responses to landscape endlessly multifaceted and contradictory; narrative-making necessarily

²⁰⁵ 'North Dorset Labour Party', *Western Gazette*, 24 September 1937, p. 14; 'Munich: What Our Readers Think', *Daily News*, 3 October 1938, p. 7; 'Spain Still Needs Aid', *Tribune*, 21 April 1939, p. 3.

²⁰⁶ See 'Left Book Club', *Portsmouth Evening News*, 16 February 1939, p. 6; also 'North Dorset Labour Party'.

²⁰⁷ 'The Way by Which I have Come', p. 19.

essentialising. Finally matured in the 1970s, Warner and Ackland's Frome Vauchurch garden made up 'a green world that had been formed and nurtured by' the pair over the years: a place that 'twisted and turned away', and where 'nature was not intimidated or blighted by regimentation'—Rebecca's plot come to life.²⁰⁸ Despite her 1939 commitment to finely treated grounds, weeds, it seemed, remained.

²⁰⁸ Tinch Minter, 'Sylvia's Gifts: Meetings with Sylvia Townsend Warner in the 1970s', *The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society*, 16 (2015), 43-52 (p. 49).

Conclusion | Fertile Ground

This thesis has examined the role of personal country gardens in the self-placing of a series of writers and artists working between the late nineteenth century and the second World War. Unpicking the significance of the narratives emanating from the cultivation of individual country ideals, I argued that each separate investment in reforming English landscape demonstrates to extent to which cultural landscape ideals were a vital context to modern artmaking. This was because the making of gardens with imagined access to history offered a way to cultivate a place within a landscape apparently under threat, and within cultural canons that were responding to such threats—pushing for new forms of expression, new interpretations, new figureheads, and new narratives. This push for the new was nevertheless based in the old: in drawing lineages from seventeenth-century estates and Country House poems; in twisting pastorals and georgics, the picturesque; and the traditions of the high Victorian artistic celebrity, for persistence onwards. My argument reframes the importance of rural life to twentieth-century art, continues to challenge canonical oppositions between modern and rural—and situates the garden squarely within critical narratives about modern art and literature. I call for further critical studies to populate the twentieth-century garden landscape and its interconnected relationship to visual, literary, and plastic arts; and I call for greater attention to the interdisciplinary methods of allied disciplines, to work towards critical studies of landscape more intimately concerned with their contexts.

The transition from the turn-of-the-century to the Second World War is perhaps most obvious in Warner's garden narratives. The endpoint of my study—her Marxist disturbances to the traditions of reading landscapes—interrogate the cultural meanings popularly ascribed to familiar cultivations of English countryside. Thinking back to Kipling's verse characterisation of England as glorious, stately garden in need of work, Warner's appraisals of the disconnect between the tasteful and "efficient" management of a plot of land, and the just government of a nation, challenge such sentimental characterisations. And yet Warner does not abandon the English garden, but continues instead to refigure

its values, and to place herself—as leftist, writer, and queer woman—within it, for good. Difficult as it was, she was compelled to reconcile the heritage of the country house garden with her visions for a collectivist future. The pull of tradition is strong: but that does not mean that these traditions cannot be reappraised and reformed in new work.

I return, briefly, to Raymond Williams, to reconsider his only (indirect) reference to Warner’s work in *The Country and the City*, nestled within a scathing review of Robertson Scott’s *The Countryman Book* (1948). Characterising the text as emblematic of that twentieth-century fictive literary anthropology, Williams argued that it

is the most perfect record I know of what country writing, within this convention, has been made to become: the fine observation and record; the out-of-doors reminiscences of Prime Ministers; the community histories; the old recipes; the stories of witches and superstitions; authors’ country cottages [...] Faced with this extraordinary amalgam, we might be tempted to give up’.¹

Faced with Williams’ summation, we too might be tempted to “give up” on the study of such texts—to read them only as limited documents tainted by nostalgia. However, as this thesis demonstrates, such a decision prevents a nuanced analysis of that tangled nexus of engagement with twentieth-century rural country. Williams “extraordinary amalgam” homogenises the rich and distinct contributions contained within the volume: perhaps, if he had slowed down, he could have taken note of Warner’s own—that attempted corrective to the ideal of the author’s country cottage, that begins by wryly musing on the malleability of the language used to talk about inhabiting rural England. “I have a country cottage”, she starts,

may mean the possession of anything from a bungalow to a small manor house, from a semi-detached villa to a reed-thatched, old-oaked architect’s fancy, plumbed within and half-timbered

¹ Williams, *The Country and the City*, pp. 375-376.

without. My cottage has four rooms [...] It is neither picturesque nor convenient. But it is freehold, and stands in a small garden, and its price was £90 only.²

Whilst Warner's engagement with the conventions governing cultural receptions of the country garden may be the most radical, each of my chapters has provided a separate snapshot into the interpretation of such conventions, each of which are firmly deserving of in-depth study.

Crucially, for each central figure in my thesis, the rural English garden and its wide-ranging significations were an essential context to understanding the places of modern life, and the arts designed to represent them. For Jekyll, gardening her way into a specific local heritage, and then selecting aspects to reimagine for posterity, the local garden held national importance precisely because it could narrate that movement between a centuries-old landscape and modern England. The seductive malleability of these narratives—their ability to combine signifiers from the cottage landscape and country house alike—launched her internationally successful career. Her expansive “local” vision was seen both in the plots of the avant-garde and the memorial sites cultivated by the Imperial War Graves Commission. It would not be unrealistic to suggest that her narratives, as they were promoted in text, distributed from her nursery, and by seed distributors like Suttons; as they were taken up by such distinct artists as Helen Allingham, Roger Fry, and Vanessa Bell; as they permeated through such periodicals as *Country Life* and became a significant part of how national landscapes were popularly understood, influenced each figure in this thesis. This influence can still be felt today—at Munstead Wood, or Hestercombe, in Taunton, both carefully brought back from decades of overgrowth; or through the purchase of the ubiquitous “Munstead” lavender strains that hark back, at least in name, to Jekyll's historic vision.

Crowds also come to the preserved Compton buildings of Mary Watts: now the Watts Gallery and Artist's Village. Mary achieved her intention of preserving George's reputation, that of her modern

² Warner, 'Concerning Artist's Cottages', p. 33.

Artist's village, and finally, of carving out her own market—a market justly receiving critical attention in recent years. Now, Mary's plot is gardened with its own modern borders tastefully suggesting their origins in the late nineteenth-century garden landscape. But not every garden in this thesis was so persistent: for Ford, Carrington, and Warner, any interpretations of landscape were severed from their accompanying plots soon after they had left. It is perhaps this tendency that led Ford to keep on writing; to keep on memorialising, the figures and landscapes of his personal English countryside, in recognition that his mark on the landscape might already be barely visible. Now, tracking such engagements is almost solely the project of literary critics, art historians, and impassioned local groups and societies that note their locale's connection to twentieth-century arts. Severed from their maker's cultivations, these gardens are changed. Their accompanying properties persist (apart from Miss Green's, which was shelled in World War II)—every few years they come up for sale, accompanied by a line or two about their historic inhabitants. The gardens display features added by later inhabitants: wide, mown lawns, patios and dining sets, new bedding. It remains possible to visit Tidmarsh Village, Rye, and Frome Vauchurch to pretend access to the past, or to try to imaginatively reconstruct the pig-stye that housed Ford's Large Blacks, the hot poker in Carrington's borders, or Warner and Ackland fishing the Frome from the Riverside terrace.

Perhaps, then, the thing that changes the least across this thesis is the nearness of the country garden to loss. The Surrey gardens of Jekyll and Watts, the pre-war and post-war cultivations of Ford, Carrington's garden retreat and Warner's earthy plots are all hovering on the very edge of total loss—that of rural heritage, local idiom, and custom; of artistic renown; of the un-memorialised rural poor at war and at work; of the builders of new canons of art and literature; of pre-war safety; and of dearly loved ones. These gardens were all excavated, and cultivated, away from finality: they move into the past in search of grounding, and into the future for attempted persistence.

By Order of the Trustees

In the 2016 preface to the expanded *Landscape and Englishness*, David Matless reviewed the significance of his study for the twenty-first century. He lingers on receiving a new passport—the 2010 redesign—with its new scenic presentation of English landscape Matless reads to ‘set out a cultural geography’.³ ‘Pages turn’, he continues, ‘to show reedbeds, coasts, canals, mountains, village greens’, but not factories, offices, retail parks, or anything identifiably urban: it makes ‘an official statement of’ ‘the mythic qualities of rural landscape, which in all corners of the UK have served to symbolize and refract national identity’.⁴ In the context of recent state concern with the free movement of labour, migration, and border control, Matless argues that ‘the row of country cottages pictured beneath the passport statement that “Her Britannic Majesty’s Secretary of State Requests and requires” free movement of the bearer is shadowed by state efforts to deny movement to others’.⁵ ‘Here is the latest hard edge to English pastoral’, he concludes.⁶ Whilst we can now undeniably suggest more recent examples of this “hard edge”, Matless’ determination that the meanings culturally attributed to rural landscape continue to hold extreme aesthetic, national and political relevance remains true. And so too in the garden, which also remains a space in which conventional ideals are re-materialised, and which establishes an enduring presence as a subject for study.

The garden still inhabits a dominant position in English cultural consciousness. In 2019, the RHS welcomed its 500,000th member, and the organisation’s Annual Report 2021-2022 provides some staggering statistics.⁷ Over 2021, there were 2,897,558 visitors to the five RHS gardens, 30,000,000 users of the RHS website, 297,496 visitors to RHS Flower Shows, and 43,605,549 ‘total interactions with RHS

³ Matless, p. 9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9; pp. 9-10.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁷ Royal Horticultural Society, ‘RHS Hits Half A Million Members’, 2022, <https://www.rhs.org.uk/about-the-rhs/articles/half-a-million-members>.

Gardening Advice’.⁸ The Monty Don-headed television series *Gardener’s World* (on its 53rd season) regularly brings in audiences of over 2,500,000 per show.⁹ ‘There has never been a time’, maintained Andy Jasper, the Head of Gardens and Parklands at the National Trust, ‘where the benefits of gardens and parklands have been so well understood by the nation’.¹⁰ The Trust now has 5.37 million members, maintains 220 gardens across the UK, and is the largest employer of horticulturalists, as well as managing 249,000 hectares of land (42% considered ‘nationally important for nature’), with 200,000 hectares of working farmland.¹¹ A picture emerges of a nation in the garden—or at least one thinking about the garden, visiting “notable” gardens, seeking advice about gardening, and interested in garden heritage—but it is worth further considering what these figures might say.

In the 2005 exhibition catalogue for *Art of the Garden*, Nicholas Alfrey, Stephen Daniels and Martin Postle suggested that ‘The idea of the garden remains strong in the popular mind’, ‘but for many, it is precisely this—an idea’, with the garden’s ‘metaphorical associations [growing] more ambiguous and more extreme’.¹² They later question what statistics like the ones provided above really mean, suggesting that popular contemporary gardening media—television programmes and their associated articles—‘have cultivated a new breed of gardener who is more wishful than actual, people who speculate and contemplate but never get their hands dirty’.¹³ It is an overly sceptical view of the typical amateur gardener, but nevertheless taps into the continued presence of the imagination in contemporary garden-making, and the role, too, of aspiration. It is an argument corroborated by the wealth of television shows

⁸ Royal Horticultural Society, *Annual Report and Consolidated Financial Statements, for the Year ended 31 January 2022*, 2022, <https://www.rhs.org.uk/about-the-rhs/pdfs/about-the-rhs/mission-and-strategy/past-annual-reports/rhs-annual-report-2021-2022.pdf>, p. 7; p. 9; p. 11.

⁹ BBC Studios, *Gardeners World, Setting the Nation’s Horticultural Agenda for 50 years*, (n.d.), <https://www.bbcstudios.com/case-studies/gardeners-world>.

¹⁰ Andy Jasper in National Trust, *Annual Report 2021-2022*, <https://redrocketdigital.co.uk/eBook/14466-National-Trust-Annual-Report-2022/index.html>, p. 15).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 14; p. 16; p. 19. Even during the pandemic, its most popular site, Attingham Park, achieved visitor numbers of over 500,000 over the 2020/21 period. See National Trust, *Annual Report 2020/2021*, (2021), https://nt.global.ssl.fastly.net/binaries/content/assets/website/national/pdf/nationaltrustannualreport2020_21.pdf, p. 93.

¹² Alfrey, Daniels and Postle, p. 10.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

that now function on the premise of transforming some “ordinary” suburban garden into something exceptional, like *Love your Garden* (first broadcast 2011), *Big Dreams Small Spaces* (from 2014), *Garden Rescue* (from 2016), and *Your Garden Made Perfect* (from 2021)—and even *Gardeners World*. Then there is the remove immediately present in the most cursory comparison of the typical, contemporary vernacular garden with those schemes maintained by such bodies as the National Trust. However, regardless of the ambitions of those who consume such gardening media, what appears particularly intriguing about the continued presence of the garden ideal—of “perfect” and “dream” gardens—is that there is still something extremely powerful about the idea of the garden, even if it is “just” that. What is also interesting is that Alfrey et al. link this twenty-first century idealism to urban/rural population demographics, where it is easiest ‘to become accustomed to experiencing nature at one remove’.¹⁴ A parallel immediately emerges between Alfrey et al.’s narrative, and between early-twentieth-century accounts equally fascinated with defining English countryside as rural labouring populations progressively reduced. Perhaps we are still as seduced by the possibility of the country—or the garden—to get ‘a chance’ at ‘that ideal’, and to give us something more.¹⁵

Our contemporary idea of the garden is nevertheless changed from that introduced in this thesis, and art has brought newly personal interpretations of gardens into popular imagination. David Rayson’s *Patio* (1998) is one pertinent example, rendering in acrylic another immediately familiar garden image, albeit one that feels aesthetically worlds apart from an Allingham. It pictures a garden, bordered by late-twentieth-century suburban semis, composed predominantly of a green lawn, a stacked white plastic set of garden table and chairs, and a patio of square, concrete patio slabs. In contrast with the painted herbaceous borders of the beginning of the century, this garden feels sparse, sterile, and somehow more artificial, even though it isn’t any more than a tastefully dishevelled cottage border. It is also a painting with a similarly documentary intent: although, whilst the Allingham school aestheticises the heart of

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 188;

¹⁵ Ford, *The Heart of the Country*, p. 32.

cottage England, Rayson meticulously documents a different England in the pursuit of a distinctly familiar generality. And gardens have also continued to further personal projects of self-placing. One figure who would certainly be discussed in an allied project of extended scope is radical filmmaker Derek Jarman, who Michael O’Pray reads as ‘part of a long line of English radicals whose work has embraced a form of Romantic conservatism’.¹⁶ *Modern Nature* (1991) is Jarman’s garden diary, and also much more than that. It is an account of the (now famous) garden cultivated on the shingle at Prospect Cottage, in Dungeness, Kent, after receiving a positive HIV diagnosis; and it is a wide-ranging autobiographical account of life, work and living—of placing oneself, however transiently.

The wider processes of gardening have also continued to take on meanings bigger than themselves: to become connected with (inter)national environmental discourses about biodiversity and climate justice. There is the recent Rewilding movement; a kind of anti-gardening approach to conservational landscape cultivation which aims to support landscapes to regain “native” biodiversity by letting nature take its course, and only intervening when strictly necessary. It is an approach that has rapidly gained in popularity since the publication of Isabella Tree’s *Wilding: The Return of Nature to a British Farm* (2018), documenting the twenty-year process of turning the Knepp Castle Estate in West Sussex away from agricultural intensification towards a landscape governed by ‘self-willed ecological processes’.¹⁷ There is something strangely powerful about the uncanny familiarity of the transformed grounds—of lake and parkland laid out in the eighteenth-century under the influence of Humphrey Repton—with the serpentine bends now a watering hole for free-roaming livestock. To Tree, Knepp represents a project of national importance both for the nation’s ecological heritage, as well as its future; but the project was by no means without controversy—in particular, that deep-set cultural determination that rural landscapes should look “right”. Tree recounts some of the received criticism: ‘Sir Charles’, wrote one complainant, ‘has turned a well farmed estate into a wasteland of thistles, docks, and

¹⁶ Michael O’Pray, *Derek Jarman: Dreams of England* (London: British Film Institute, 1996), p. 8.

¹⁷ Isabella Tree, *Wilding: The Return of Nature to a British Farm* (London: Picador, 2018), p. 27.

ragwort'.¹⁸ Such reactions demonstrate that altering sites that appear to represent an ideal English rural landscape still upsets dominant interpretational narratives. It gestures to a further need for us to expose these narratives, and to consider how they have continued to mutate through the second World War into the twenty-first century—through that period, Matless reminds us, where contemporary assumptions about landscape crystallised and then persisted.

Such reactionary responses to narrative upset is seen not just in reactions to new cultivations of historic landscapes, but to new cultivations of their histories. In 2020, the National Trust released the essential *Interim Report on the Connections between Colonialism and Properties Now in the Care of the National Trust, Including Links with Historic Slavery*. The report demonstrated the organisation's commitment to reappraising the histories of their properties in line with an appropriately diverse interpretation of founder Octavia Hill's determination that the Trust 'should speak to, and for, everyone'.¹⁹ It rightly recognised that

a significant number of the collections, houses, gardens and parklands in our care were created or modelled as expressions of the taste and wealth, as well as of power and privilege, that derived from colonial connections and in some cases from the trade in enslaved people.²⁰

Initial research detailed that 29 properties possess links to (successful) slave-ownership compensation claims; with circa a third of the Trust's properties—and many of the gardens—possessing a direct connection to colonial activities.²¹ Kipling's Bateman's in Sussex makes the list: the British Empire

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

¹⁹ Gus Casely-Hayford in National Trust, *Interim Report on the Connections between Colonialism and Properties Now in the Care of the National Trust, Including Links with Historic Slavery*, <https://nt.global.ssl.fastly.net/binaries/content/assets/website/national/pdf/colonialism-and-historic-slavery-report.pdf>, p. 4;

²⁰ Sally-Anne Huxtable, Tarnya Cooper, and John Orna-Ornstein, in *Interim*, pp. 5-6 (p. 5).

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5. See page 62 of the report for the criteria by which the Trust determined colonial activity, which include wealth acquired to slavery proceeds or through compensation; ownership of organisation connected to; or with significant interests in enslaved people or overseas companies; history of involvement, (either pro or against) abolition.

being, as the report notes, ‘a central theme and context of his literary output’.²² Kipling’s design for the Bateman’s gardens—including a rose garden, series of yew hedges, and pond—were paid for using the £7,700 won for the 1907 Nobel Prize for Literature, imbuing his later metaphorical characterisation of England as stately garden with an explicitly colonial mindset.²³ To augment Matless’ reading of pastoral’s hard edge, here was another skeleton in the closet of those gardened English idylls, brought explicitly into public view. It is a context never far from the modern English garden. One side of this context was discussed in my first chapter, when I considered the role of narrative in highlighting and naturalising the modern horticulturalist’s use of “exotic” cultivars in the “local” garden, but there is still much more to do.²⁴

There was significant backlash to the Trust’s report from right-wing politicians and media outlets, based upon suggestions that the Trust’s leadership was pursuing a defamatory and ‘woke agenda’ for British history (although Tarnya Cooper later reported that despite online claims about an ‘exodus’ of unhappy members, the Trust had not noticed ‘a massive drop-off in membership’—and whilst they had received 771 complains, this only made up 0.05% of total members).²⁵ Nevertheless, then Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden asserted that ‘public funds must never be used for political purposes’; in January 2021, the (right-wing) Common Sense Group requested that the government investigate whether the Arts Council funding of the allied Colonial Countryside project was appropriate, describing it as an ‘ideologically motivated endeavour’; and that the Charity Commission examine whether The National

²² Ibid., p. 69.

²³ Keith Spence, *The Companion Guide to Kent and Sussex* (London: Collins, 1999), p. 236.

²⁴ Lutyens role in imperial architecture has been widely discussed: see G. A. Bremner (ed.), *Architecture and Urbanism in the British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

²⁵ Christopher Hope, ‘National Trust Members Accuse Board of “Woke Agenda” In Stormy Virtual AGM’, *The Telegraph*, 8 November 2021, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2020/11/08/national-trust-members-accuse-board-woke-agenda-stormy-virtual/>; Peter Mitchell, ‘The National Trust is Under Attack Because it Cares about History, Not Fantasy’, *The Guardian*, 12 November 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/nov/12/national-trust-history-slavery>; Tarnya Cooper, in Mark Brown, ‘National Trust Reassesses Colonial History of Properties’, *The Guardian*, 22 September 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/sep/22/national-trust-reassesses-colonial-history-of-properties>

Trust had been justified in pursuing their own report (they had), and whether they had breached UK charity law (they had not).²⁶

Priya Satia has recently read the backlash as amongst a recent trend rehearsing rhetoric relying on ‘Victorian pieties about colonial upliftment’—rightly suggesting that such furore confirms the ‘persistence of colonial ways of using history to justify imperial commitments’, and ‘the urgent need to reckon constructively with Britain’s imperial past’.²⁷ It is a position I share, and it augments my closing remarks about this thesis’ wider significance. I have called for diversification to critical interpretations of modern gardens and landscape; to widen methodological approaches to the cultivation of England; to keep matching an interest in the metaphorical associations of such sites with a close attention to the contexts of their cultivation, their reciprocal interrelations with wider artistic cultures, and their continued challenge to critical dichotomies between “modern” and “rural”. These proposals remain just as relevant today, with the modern garden enduring as a site of rich, aesthetic and political associations. It is still, too, a site and idea through which we place ourselves both individually and communally.

²⁶ Jessica Murray, ‘Politicians should not “weaponise” history, says colonialism researcher’, *The Guardian*, 22 February 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2021/feb/22/politicians-should-not-weaponise-uk-history-says-colonialism-researcher>; Patrick Butler, ‘National Trust Report on Slavery Links Did Not Break Charity Law, Regulator Says’, *The Guardian*, 11 March 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/mar/11/national-trust-report-uk-slavery-links-did-not-break-charity-law-regulator-says>.

²⁷ Priya Satia, ‘Britain’s Culture War: Disguising Imperial Politics as Historical Debate about Empire’, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 24 (2022) 308-320 (p. 308).

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