The Woman in the Garden

Representations of Femininity and Domestic Gardens in Nineteenth Century Writing and Twentieth Century Film

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis will examine the ways in which the garden acts as a space where dominant representational accounts of femininity are both reflected and subverted by critically analysing a range of texts which situate women in the garden. These will include the horticultural publications of Jane Wells Webb Loudon, the novels *Elizabeth and her German Garden* (1898) and *The Solitary Summer* (1899) by Elizabeth Von Arnim and the films *The Assam Garden* (1985, dir. Mary McMurray) and *The Draughtsman's Contract* (1985, dir. Peter Greenaway). Each text (re)presents a woman, or women, in the garden, a space conventionally regarded as one of constraint and enclosure, contributing to notions of female passivity and restraint. I aim to demonstrate that, rather than a being a conservative space, the garden is able to encompass a range of representational ambiguities/ contradictions.

Using a methodology informed by, but not limited to, feminism, this thesis takes a multi-disciplinary approach, engaging with fields as diverse as art and garden history, social history, horticulture and cultural and historical studies and sets out to contribute to analyses of representation, explored through notions of gender by using the garden as a starting point for investigation. My thesis will be informed by a feminist methodology, in particular the approach of feminist geographers who have addressed the subject of gardens and garden histories from a female perspective. The texts selected embody, implicitly or explicitly, an engagement with dominant ideas about the role of women. Each work will be read in historically and culturally specific contexts framed by the issues and concerns of the period and explored for the ways in which notions of femininity are both reproduced and destabilized in the garden. Textual analysis will form the basis of the primary research, while secondary sources will be used to provide contextual detail. A thematic engagement with notions of space, agency, and identity underpin this work.

A large body of literature has considered the history and meaning of the garden, its design and, more recently, the space of the garden itself. Although ideas of representation have been a central feature of academic study in cultural, media and feminist studies, little scholarship has been dedicated to the ways in which femininity has been represented in the garden. This thesis will contribute to debates about femininity, drawing attention to the garden as a space for the construction of meaning and suggests that the garden, both physically and conceptually, embraces competing and contradictory discourses.

The chapter on Jane Loudon focusses on her horticultural writing and specifically on the ways in which it represents women as actively engaging with the work of gardening, offering its nineteenth century female readers an alternative view of feminine propriety. My reading of von Arnim's work develops themes outlined in the previous chapter and suggests that Elizabeth too was an active gardener. In this chapter I foreground notions of enclosure and retreat for the female gardener and draw attention to the meaning of space for the late nineteenth century, early twentieth century definitions of femininity.

My discussion of *The Draughtsman's Contract*, proposes a totally different reading, focussing on the language of horticulture and its use in enshrining particular qualities associated with the feminine and the ways in which representations of the feminine are aligned with ideas of nature and the land. Key here are notions of prospect and view, nature and the land. My exploration of *The Assam Garden* extends the discussions of space developed by feminist cultural geographers and examines how two women restore a garden and forge a friendship which crosses class and ethnic boundaries, against a background of possession and prevailing definitions of what it means to be feminine.

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Chapters Four and Five on *The Draughtsman's Contract* and *The Assam Garden* respectively feature screen-grabs from the films and these therefore appear as unsourced.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Andrew Teverson for his ever gentle and constructive criticism.

Author's declaration

I declare that this thesis has been written by me and that the work contained within it is entirely my own. I also declare that the work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Introduction

A large body of literature has described the history of the garden and cultural geographers have explored how gardens have constituted gender relations, the ways in which representations of women in the garden have informed views of femininity across a range of texts has not been examined. The contradictory representations of femininity and the contexts in which these representations have been created provide a framework for a re-reading of the female figure in the garden. The purpose of my work is to explore the continuities and discontinuities in representations of femininity and to consider how female horticultural activity in the garden serves both to support but also to undermine conventional representations. This thesis examines how constructions of femininity in nineteenth century writing and twentieth century film reveal the hesitation and uncertainty of women acting within the confines of these stereotypes, but also the ways in which representations of the female figure in the garden are able to destabilize these restrictive categories.

The texts selected for study are the horticultural publications of Jane Wells Webb Loudon (1807-1858); the novels *Elizabeth and her German Garden* (1898) and *The Solitary Summer* (1899) by Elizabeth von Arnim and the films, *The Draughtsman's Contract* (1982, dir. Peter Greenaway) and *The Assam Garden* (1985, dir. Mary McMurray). I have chosen to focus on these texts as each represents an important and significantly different response to the ideological constructions of the period in which they are set and each uses the garden as the space in which these responses take place. What brings these texts together as a group is a series of overlaps in material, space and authorship. Each shares a recognition, whether consciously or unconsciously, of constructions of gender and uses the garden as a space where discourses of femininity are explored. By focusing on three types of cultural text – advice periodical, novel and film - this thesis will explore the tensions and contradictions in how women have

been represented as subjects in the garden and how women have constructed themselves. The case studies will form key points for analysis. Each case study is an example of multiple competing discourses, selected from different periods and media. While three are authored by women, the exception to the group in terms of authorship is the film, *The Draughtsman's Contract* and included because of its extended metaphor aligning femininity and fecundity with the gardened landscape. All have the garden as their focus.

My own horticultural education began at an early age. Born into a family in which the land and the way in which it is worked is deeply ingrained, gardening provided a point both of connection and stability in what had proved to be, for my parents, a profoundly unsettled world. My relationship to my subject matter embraces not only those positions which I have chosen to adopt, but also to the multiple ways in which I am myself positioned by gender, class and ethnicity. I am grounded in the radical feminism and politics of the 1970s and conscious that my values are shaped by my experience of being white and female and ultimately middle class. My relationship to gardening, the practice and the product, is at once inherited and adopted. At the same time, my experience as the child of immigrant refugee parents has formed roots which extend beyond national boundaries. A keen sense of shifting cultural identity and the mutability of not only boundaries themselves, but what they delineate has created the conditions for disciplinary preferences which tread and re-tread the themes in which I am interested. In *Yearning*[1] hooks explores what it means to be brought up as a black child in a segregated society and notes the perception of being on the 'margin'. As McDowell[2] points out these boundaries are set by sex, race and class and there is a sense of what hooks describes as 'moving out of one's place'[3] in the texts I have selected for study. Jane Loudon wrote horticultural advice texts, drawing on science, in a field dominated by men, while Helen Graham in *The Assam Garden* struggles with an unmanageable space

[1] hooks, b. (2015) *Yearning. Race, Gender and Cultural Politics,* Routledge, New York and London. Electronic.
[2] McDowell, L (1999) *Gender, Identity and Place. Understanding Feminist Geographies,* Polity Press.
[3] hooks, b. (2015) p148.

created by her husband. Elizabeth von Arnim grapples with definitions of femininity which sees women confined to the domestic and the mother and daughter in *The Draughtsman's Contract* plot to outwit their male counterparts in their domination of property. Feelings of marginality may be a condition of the immigrant experience, but writers such as Pollock[4] and Rose[5] (from very different perspectives) have powerfully demonstrated that this often underscores the experience of being female.

My early research questions focussed around how gender, class and ethnicity have been represented in the garden in film. The garden as an essentially conservative space, one often imbued with a sense of nostalgia, informed many of these representations and, for me, this had a special resonance. As a female horticulturalist with a lifetime of growing experience and against a background of feminist activism of the 1970s and 1980s my focus increasingly shifted to an examination of how the figure of the female had been inserted into the gardening landscape and across a broader range of texts. I became interested to see how this space could also support an alternative narrative, one in which women in particular might be represented in ways which diverged from conventional forms. Themes which I had identified at the start of my research journey – ideas of enclosure, restraint and passivity; questions about space, public versus private and who occupies that space; a view of the garden as 'natural' as opposed to a constructed space; ideas of identity and belonging – circulate throughout my work. All coalesce in my framing of this study through addressing one key question which seems to me to be critical in the articulation of the ways in which the representation of femininity in the garden is ideological: how does the space of the garden offer an opportunity to resist conventional representations of femininity and in what ways have women used the garden to subvert those conventional definitions?

[4] Pollock, G. (1988) *Vision and Difference. Feminism, Femininity and the Histories of Art*, Routledge
[5] Rose, G. (1993) *Feminism and Geography. The limits of geographical knowledge*, Polity Press

The thesis is divided into four interrelated chapters, each responding to the core thesis statement by exploring the ways in which each text reflects and subverts dominant narratives of femininity and by interrogating the ways in which the garden acts as a space for constructing femininities.

Chapter one, 'Conventional Views', sets the context for the remaining chapters of the thesis by exploring how women have been represented in the garden and provides a starting point for an investigation of the ways in which much prevailing discourse situates women and gardens and considers how the texts examined in this thesis each in its way both embody and resist this designation. I outline some of the key contributions to the field of study and offer an overview of the traditional ways in which the garden has acted as a space for the representation of women, exploring a range of texts to support this examination. In this chapter I introduce some of the key theoretical constructs which have been used to characterise domestic space and the representation of women, from the work of cultural geographers Rose and Massey[6] to that of Berger[7] and Butler.[8] Ideas of enclosure and restraint embodied in the work of Bending[9] and the recognition by writers such as Dixon Hunt and Daniels[10], that gardens 'represent the world outside them' underpin my discussion. My thesis argues that the activity of gardening provides women with the opportunity to engage with far more than the domestic and that an examination of the representation of women through the lens of gardens and gardening offers the prospect of not only expanding the meaning of gardening but also a challenge to conventional views of representation.

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[6] Rose, G. (1993) *Feminism and Geography. The limits of geographical knowledge*, Polity Press; Massey, D. (1994) *Space, Place and Gender*, Polity Press.

[7] Berger, J. (1976) *Ways of Seeing*, British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books.

[8] Butler, J. (1990) Gender Trouble, Feminist Theory, and Psychoanalytic Discourse, in Nicholson, J. ed *Feminism/Postmodernism*, Routledge.

[9] Bending, S. (2013) *Green Retreats. Women, Gardens and Eighteenth Century Culture*, Cambridge University Press.

[10] Dixon Hunt, J. (2000) *Greater Perfections*, Thames and Hudson; Daniels, S. Love and Death across an English Garden: Constable's Paintings of His Family's Flower and Kitchen Gardens, in The Huntingdon Library Quarterly, 1992 Vol 55 issue 3 pages 433-458.

In chapter two, 'Jane Wells Webb Loudon. Gardening for Ladies' I will argue that the ways in which Jane Wells Webb Loudon's horticultural publications represented women in the garden differed from the gardening manuals popular at the time, both in terms of the nature of the content, the mode of address and also in terms of potential influence. Although Jane Loudon worked with her husband to produce a range of magazines and books on gardening, for the purposes of this research, the focus will be on the horticultural writing[11] that she wrote and published or edited herself. Of Jane Loudon's prolific output, horticulture formed the subject matter of the majority of the work that she produced and it is this which has attracted the least attention from scholars. From the late eighteenth century through to the Victorian period the language of cultivation underpinned discussions about women and education. Page and Smith note that 'The idea of cultivating a garden became a foundational metaphor in educational theory and practice'[12] and as Shteir[13] has pointed out, botany came to be seen as a particularly suitable subject for women and girls. Thus from the end of the eighteenth century through to the late nineteenth century the role of horticultural knowledge, gardens and plants had become increasingly important to definitions of femininity and what was seen as appropriate for women and although Jane Loudon's work clearly capitalised on this development and on wider changes in society, I will argue that her writing offers a more nuanced picture. I suggest that the horticultural writing of Jane Loudon presented women in the garden as active performers and that the space of the garden became a platform from which women were able to engage with a wider social and political discourse. This chapter will show that the garden in the horticultural journals of Jane Loudon was a critical site of representation in which social constructions of femininity could be negotiated. Although the alignment of the domestic garden with the private sphere clearly circumscribed the terms in which this discourse took place, mid-nineteenth century values of separate spheres for men and women are challenged by

[11] See the list of horticultural publications which will be the focus of this thesis following the Bibliography.
[12] Page, J.W. and Smith, E.L. (2011) *Women Literature and the Domesticated Landscape, England's Disciples of Flora, 1780-1870,* Cambridge University Press. P.3.
[13] Shteir, A. (1996) *Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science. Flora's Daughters and Botany in England. 1760 to 1860.* John Hopkins University Press.

Jane Loudon's representation of women in the garden. Not only her horticultural writing but her own experience demonstrate that ideas of separate spheres of activity can simultaneously embrace and subvert conventional orthodoxies. I suggest that the horticultural writing of Jane Loudon presents the garden as a space in which women were able to be active and independent and to develop a degree of agency and also one which enabled women to engage with a wider social and political discourse. In doing so she constructs the garden as a space for experimentation, representing women as agents outside the domestic thus providing new ways of constructing femininity.

Chapter three, **'**Elizabeth von Arnim: acting languid', positions von Arnim's work in the context of the social and intellectual history of the period and shows how her representation of the woman in the garden both articulated and challenged existing discourses. Using *Elizabeth and her German Garden* and *A Solitary Summer*, her two novels considered 'garden romances', I will consider how the space of the garden described in von Arnim's work, intersected with historical debates around gender, examining the idea that the garden at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century offered middle class women an opportunity to create an identity which engaged with broadly developing ideas in society. This chapter will show that the garden in the two novels was a significant site of representation in which social constructions of femininity were destabilised and re-negotiated. This reading of von Arnim's 'garden romances' is important in situating her work within the discourse of representations of femininity, exposing some of the contradictions inherent in not only prevailing ideologies, but the way in which von Arnim's work itself has been viewed. Hugely popular and widely-read during her lifetime, the subject matter of von Arnim's novels clearly resonated with a generation of women. In her German garden, Elizabeth pushes at the boundaries of the domestic by reading books on philosophy and considers worldly issues, while viewing the interior of the home and all that it entails as a form of confinement. The garden, for the represented Elizabeth, is an emancipating environment.

Chapter four, 'Re-reading *The Draughtsman's Contract'*, explores more explicitly the analogy of the landscape and female body through Peter Greenaway's film, *The Draughtman's Contract* (1982). Most discussion of the film has focussed on Greenaway's cinematography, its engagement with the history of landscape gardening and its use of space(s) and the representation of the landscape itself. Greenaway himself has stated that a great deal of investigation went into finding a suitable location for the film and his submission to the BFI for funding in 1980 gives an indication of the detail of his research.[14] In an interview which appeared in the BFI's Monthly Film Bulletin, he points to the 'whole sub-text of gardening'[15] as informing the film. Throughout the film repeated comparisons are made between women and/as property and fruit and the female anatomy. This chapter will examine how the women in the film, Mrs. Herbert and her daughter, Sarah Tallman, take ownership of the analogy and use it to subvert both the representation of the females in the film and the dominance of the male. Like the other women, both fictional and real, discussed in this thesis my analysis points to the ways in which the women in the film have been able to revise, interrupt and disrupt the dominant masculine discourse.

Chapter five focusses on Mary McMurray's *The Assam Garden* (1985). This was the final film of Deborah Kerr's career and McMurray's only venture into film – her other work was for television. There are very few extant reviews of the film and it has received little scholarly attention, despite the fact that it references some of the key issues of the 1980s. The limited reviews of the film draw attention to the fine performances of the two leads (Deborah Kerr and Madhur Jaffery) and YouTube videos reveal the extent to which Kerr took pride in a role which presented a woman as an active participant, rather than a passive recipient of events. As discussed in chapters two and three, the garden is a key site of representation in which social constructions of femininity are disrupted and re-evaluated. In '*The Assam Garden*. "Too much weeding"' the figure of the woman in the garden is reconstructed as one who is

[14] http://greenaway.bfi.org.uk/_dvd_bonus/display.php?theme=2&type=Original%20Proposal&title=draughtsman&folder=008_appendices&thumb=dc_proposal_112&fcount=8. [Acc. 23.03.23]
[15] Programme notes and credits compiled by the BFI Documentation Unit Monthly Film Bulletin 1982.

active and draws attention to a wider social and political discourse. Notions of separate spheres for men and women, alluded to in previous chapters will also be drawn on here. In the film questions of power, memory and femininity are opened up in the use of the garden as a narrative space. The film highlights the contradictory nature of the woman in the garden, with its implications of both freedom and social constraint, but also points to class-based and colonial power relations, drawing on notions of identity, culture, enclosure and control, exclusion and retreat: all themes which will be developed in this chapter. During the 1980s more features were directed, produced and written by women. Cook and Dodd[16] argue that over this period there was a developing interest in what became known as the 'woman's picture', which had a 'narrative predicated on female desire'[17] and the publication of Mulvey's article, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* in *Screen*, created opportunities for discussion around the idea of 'woman as image'.[18] These perspectives are critical to an understanding of the way in which the narrative strategy of the film operates. As Tudor points out, '[The] more nuanced view of the gaze structures our understanding of ways that these same visual and narrative strategies define cinematic representations of … gender'.[19] Nevertheless, there is a strong case to be made for the visual and narrative strategy of *The Assam Garden* which reworks conventional Hollywood cinema, by focussing on the activity of a woman in her garden, in particular, a middle-aged woman. The film resists simple definition, but by placing a woman 'at the centre of the narrative cause and effect,'[20] in an otherwise unassuming fiction, McMurray subverts conventional cinematic narrative, transgressing more conservative age and gender mores. Located in the 1980s, *The Assam Garden* also encompasses anxieties about change and shifting boundaries in its depictions of race and class and, although not the focus of this thesis, these will be alluded to. A reading of Friedman, Hewison, Higson, Hill, Monk and

[16] Cook, P. and Dodd P. (1993) *Women and Film. A Sight and Sound Reader,* Temple University Press
[17] Cook, P. and Dodd P. (1993) p xviii
[18] Mulvey, L. (1989) *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Macmillan. P.19.
[19] Tudor, D. Encounters with Thatcherism: Four Women Filmmakers in Friedman, L.D. ed. (2006) *Fires Were Started. British Cinema and Thatcherism*, University of Minnesota Press. P. 141.
[20] Tudor, D. (2006) p140.

Sargent, Dave[21] suggests that the twin rhetorics of gender and racism in a range of formulations dominated the period and these are reflected in McMurray's film, where the garden is used as a space for these to be explored.

Using a methodology informed by, but not limited to feminism, this thesis takes a muti-disciplinary approach, engaging with fields as diverse as garden history, social history, horticulture, art and literature and cultural geography. While I explore the representation of women in the garden across a range of disciplinary fields, a feminist critique aligns well with these critical methods. Through close reading and a creative and qualitative textual analysis appropriate to each type of text this thesis will explore the tensions and contradictions in how women have been represented as subjects in the garden and how women have constructed themselves. Organising such a large and indeterminate body of material has not been without its challenges and I have adopted a case study methodology, framing my study around a series of themes. Each case study is an example of multiple competing discourses, selected from different periods and media. The texts will be read in historically and culturally specific contexts framed by the issues and concerns of the period and explored for the ways in which notions of femininity are both reproduced and destabilized in the garden. Textual analysis will form the basis of the primary research, while secondary sources will be used to provide contextual detail. My interpretation of each of the texts has been guided by the nature of the text itself, whether film, novel or advice text. The interview with Elizabeth Bond was based on a fortuitous discovery through a Google search and, when finally contacted, Elizabeth was kind enough to allow me an interview. Our conversation was particularly useful in highlighting the way in which the character of Helen Graham was formulated. I found no method for contacting Peter Greenaway and this work remains without an

[21] Dave, P. (2006) *Visions of England. Class and Culture in Contemporary Britain*, Berg; Friedman, L.D. ed. (2006) *Fires Were Started. British Cinema and Thatcherism*, Wallflower Press; Hewison, R. (2014) *Cultural Capital, The Rise and Fall of Creative Britain* Verso, London, NY; Hill, J. (1990)*British Cinema in the 1980s*, Clarendon Press; Monk, C. and Sargeant, A. eds. (2002) *British Historical Cinema*, Routledge.

interview with him. This discrepancy may be regarded as disappointing, but I do not think it is disadvantageous to the work as a whole.

My study draws on a range of theoretical sources using the work of feminist cultural geographers Domosh and Seager, and Rose[22]; the feminist approaches to art history of Nochlin and Pollock [23], including the seminal work of both Mulvey [24] and Berger[25] and those who have developed a more theoretical approach to garden writing such as Dixon Hunt[26], Daniels[27] and work from the Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium. Notions of performativity, identity and space inform my work at all stages and thus Judith Butler, Stuart Hall and Michel Foucault are ever-present, even if not articulated. My discussion is indebted to the work of a huge range of writers who have demonstrated how a feminist criticism aligns with other critical methods, among them Thornham[28] writing about film and Poovey[29] on the work of female authors to name but two. This thesis contributes to debates about the role of the garden in constructions of femininity and offers a fresh assessment of the complex relationship between women, gardens and gardening.

[22] Domosh, M. and Seager, J. (2001) *Putting Women in Place. Feminist Geographers Make Sense of the World,* The Guilford Press; Rose, G. (1993) *Feminism and Geography. The limits of geographical knowledge*, Polity Press.
[23] Nochlin, L. (2021) *Why have there been no great women artists? 50th anniversary edition*, Thames and Hudson online; Pollock, G. (1988) *Vision and Difference. Feminism, Femininity and the Histories of Art*, Routledge
[24] Mulvey, L. (1975) Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema, *Screen*, 16 (3) pp6-18.
[25] Berger, J. (1976) *Ways of Seeing*, British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books.
[26] Dixon Hunt, J. (2000) *Greater Perfections*, Thames and Hudson
[27] Daniels, S. Love and Death across an English Garden: Constable's Paintings of His Family's Flower and Kitchen Gardens, in The Huntingdon Library Quarterly, 1992 Vol 55 issue 3 pages 433-458.
[28] Thornham, S. (2012) *What if I had been the hero?* Palgrave MacMillan
[29] Poovey, M. (1984) *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer. Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley and Jane Austen*, University of Chicago Press.

Chapter One. Conventional Views

Fig 1.1 Sargent, J.S. *(1888) Morning Walk*
Available at: https://www.wikiart.org/en/john-singer-sargent/all-works#!#filterName:Style_impressionism,resultType:masonry
(Acc. 17/06/2021)

She gathered cuckoo-spittle on her skirts, cracking snails that were underfoot, staining her hands with thistle-milk and slug-slime, and rubbing off upon her naked arms sticky blights which, though snow-white on the apple-tree trunks, made madder stains on her skin.[30]

'I notice that it is only when my mother is working in her flowers that she is radiant … She has handed down respect for the possibilities - and the will to grasp them'.[31]

1.1 Introduction

There is nothing new in the identification of women with gardens and gardening: gardens both, materially and symbolically, have long been associated with the female body and the garden is often seen to be 'natural', an appropriate space for women and children. The above quotation from *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* clearly aligns the woman with nature: the snails, the stains on her hands and the sticky blights on her 'naked arms'. Hardy's description of Tess in this scene from the novel describes her in sensual terms. The novel presents Tess as a 'field woman', pure, simple and unaffected, at one with a

[30] Hardy, T. (1971) *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, MacMillan St. Martin's Press, p158.
[31] Walker, A. In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens, in Mitchell, A. ed. (1994) *Within the Circle. An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Haarlem Renaissance to the Present*, Duke University Press, p.408. Downloaded from http://l-adam-mekler.com/walker_in_search.pdf. 30/09/2022

nature which is itself seen as pure, simple and unadulterated. This image of wild abandonment contrasts with an alternative representation of the female figure in the garden which evokes narratives of constraint and passivity: reading a book while reclining in the sun, picking flowers or strolling alongside a stretch of water. In her study of Augustan landscape design Fabricant demonstrates how these twin themes suffused the political and cultural landscape of the period in their use of terminology which at once described women as constrained and disciplined creatures, but also needing to be tamed, reflecting a society 'which demanded contradictory things from its women and its landscapes alike'.[32] Conventional representations of the domestic garden describe a feminine and feminized space, reflecting and supporting contemporary gender ideologies, whether it be through the objectification of the female body or the alignment of women with delicacy and nurturing. Yet these ideas have continued to inform many of the representations of women in gardens into the twenty-first century.

In 2013, almost forty years after the first edition of *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* had been published, Pollock made a resounding case for the continuing importance of foregrounding issues of representation,[33] '[if one] only encounters representations of women and ethnic or sexual others in roles of servitude domestic, rural or sexual, what sense of … self … is internalize[d]?'.[34] She argues that 'despite art's deceptive marginality in real material and political terms, the privileged discourses of and on art served symbolic purposes that disseminated … concepts of Eurocentricism and masculine supremacy'.[35] The 'core narratives', as Pollock ascribes them to women, which may be described as feminine dependence, and restraint, the alignment of women with nature and with the small and the detailed, have informed a representation of the garden as a conservative frame for the confinement of

[32] Fabricant, C. Binding and Dressing Nature's Loose Tresses. The Ideology of Augustan Landscape Design, *Studies in Eighteenth Culture*, 1979, Vol. 8 pp 109-135, London Press of Case Western Reserve, p.131.
[33] As has Nochlin in her Anniversary Edition to the original essay.
[34] Parker, R. and Pollock, G. (2013) *Old Mistresses. Women Art and Ideology*, Bloomsbury Academic, p.42.
[35] Pollock, G. (2013) p.18.

women, creating, in Pollock's words, 'a prison-house of meaning'[36] thus reinforcing conventionally produced structures of understanding in which femininity is inscribed in particular ways.[37] While Nochlin's[38] essay in 1971, 'Why Are There No Great Women Artists?' heralded a debate around the role of women in art both as subjects and as artists, Mulvey[39] drew attention to the structure of the cinematic gaze. Throughout the 1970s in the UK, feminists such as Greer, Rowbotham, Mitchell and Oakley[40] were publishing work which argued for a reassessment of the role of women in twentieth century society, which included how women were represented on the cinema screen, in advertising and in art.

This first chapter, 'Conventional Views', explores the ways in which women have been represented in the garden and provides a starting point for an investigation of the ways in which much prevailing discourse situates women and gardens and the way in which the texts examined in this thesis each in its way both embody and resist this designation. I outline some of the key contributions to the field of study and offer an overview of the conventional ways in which the garden has acted as a space for the representation of women, exploring a range of texts to support this examination.

[36] Pollock, G. (2001) p.xxx. I am, however, using her terminology differently.

[37] The debates which dominated second wave feminism regarding the social construction of gender and the existing inequalities between men and women remain significant both socially and academically. That these debates became more problematic through the 1970s and 1980s, intersected and interconnected by race and class pointed to a more complicated understanding of the 'ways in which race and class are mutually constituted', McDowell, L. and Sharp. J.P. eds. (1997) *Space, Gender and Knowledge. Feminist Readings*, Arnold, p5. While I fully acknowledge the importance of these debates, they do not form a central aspect of this study.

[38] Nochlin, L. (2021) *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?* 50th Anniversary Edition, Thames and Hudson.

[39] Mulvey, L. (1975) Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema, *Screen*, 16 (3) pp6-18. https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/16.3.6

[40] Greer, G. (1970) *The Female Eunuch*, Paladin; Mitchell, J. and Oakley, A. (1976) *The Rights and Wrongs of Women*, Penguin Books; Rowbotham, S. (1974) *Women, Resistance and Revolution*, Penguin Books.

1.2 Views of the garden

There are numerous popular and academic descriptions of the historical development of the garden, many of which provide a conventional account which focuses on design and landscape architecture. In these accounts, women barely feature except for purposes of illustration. Vercelloni and Vercelloni's *The Invention of the Western Garden*,[41] for example, and Clark's *Landscape into Art*[42] to name but two. Other texts which take an ostensibly broader view of the garden, such as Cooper's, *A Philosophy of Gardens*[43] similarly omit women. There has been some attempt to shift the discussion of gardens away from a purely historiographical approach, for example, by Dixon Hunt and Laird.[44] In *Greater Perfections: The Practice of Garden Theory*, one of the first gardening texts to create a theoretical discourse on the subject of gardening, Dixon Hunt adopted what he described as a 'conceptual approach' to a discussion of the garden and his writing weaves together art, literature and poetry into a study of garden history.[45] Dixon Hunt offers a definition of the garden as both a defined space and one which relates to other areas of society and the natural world. Recognising that gardens act as both material and symbolical signifiers, he notes that 'Garden enclosures both define their spaces and appeal across boundaries'.[46] Like Dixon Hunt, Laird[47] takes a broad view of the garden. Using information from diaries, letters and journals he explores how the natural world was brought into the garden and was one of the few to examine the role played by women in garden history, albeit those from the wealthy and privileged classes.

[41] Vercelloni, M. and Vercelloni, V. (trans. Stanton D.) (2009) *The Invention of the Western Garden* Waverley Books.
[42] Clark, K. (1976) *Landscape into Art*, John Murray
[43] Cooper, D.E. (2006) *A Philosophy of Gardens*, Oxford University Press.
[44] Dixon Hunt, J. (2000) *Greater Perfections,* Thames and Hudson; Laird, M. (2015) *A Natural History of English Gardening,* Paul Mellon Centre, Yale University Press.
[45] Dixon Hunt in turn acknowledges a debt to the Center for Studies in Landscape Architecture at Dumbarton Oaks, Washington D.C. who have themselves published a range of papers on the subject.
[46] Dixon Hunt, J. (2000) p.29.
[47] Laird, M. (2015) ibid

A dominant narrative which has focussed on the influence of the great male landscape artist or architect has served to exclude the contribution of women while a visual and textual vocabulary which aligns women with nature and the natural has established conventional representations of the female figure in the garden in passive and ornamental ways. The omission of women from standard accounts of garden history was highlighted in a series of lectures curated by Way in 2021 for the Gardens Trust titled 'Forgotten Women Gardeners'. Way underlined not only the more prominent names such as Alice de Rothschild, but also Sarah Drake, Louisa Lawrence and Mary Delaney, while Reid,[48] who also contributed a paper, drew attention to the pivotal role played by a number of women gardeners in the development of public spaces in Scotland. Shencker begins her essay on women and the English middle class in the nineteenth century by criticising the modernist paradigm which, she claims, has focused on 'individual creative genius, artistic masterpieces, high styles and a succession of periods'[49] which has marginalized the work of many, in particular women. Although writing about art, Pollock similarly notes that 'the very concept of genius, of greatness, was itself gendered masculine'.[50] Shencker argues that, 'It has produced meticulous formal analyses of gardens-as-art but offered little insight into the world of social relations and cultural politics in which garden art takes place'[51] and proposes analyses which take into account the broader social context. While the production of art and the creation of landscapes have been problematised by feminist geographers and art historians, the representation of the female figure in the garden has been less well explored.

[48] Reid, D. (2015) *Unsung Heroines of Horticulture, Scottish Gardening Women 1800 – 1930*, PhD paper submitted to University of Edinburgh.
[49] Schenker, H. (2002) Women, Gardens and the English Middle Class in the Early Nineteenth Century in Conan, M. ed. *Bourgeois and Aristocratic Cultural Encounters in Garden Art 1550 – 1850*, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, p.337.
[50] Pollock, R. (2003) p.23.
[51] Schenker, H. (2002) p.337.

1.3 Putting women back into the garden

Few writers have explored the relationship of women to the garden or women gardeners in any great detail apart from specifically biographical accounts of prominent personalities such as Vita Sackville West, Gertrude Jekyll and Beth Chatto. A few scholars such as Bermingham,[52] Willis,[53] Brown,[54] Hoyles[55] and Bending[56] have each sought to create a space within the discourse for women. In his book *The Story of Gardening* Hoyles includes a chapter 'Women and Gardening' and Brown devotes a chapter to 'Emancipated Gardeners' in *The Pursuit of Paradise.* Both texts describe the existence of female gardeners and the possible reasons for their exclusion from narratives of garden history. Approaching their subject matter from a predominantly historically descriptive perspective, Way's[57] *Virgins, Weeders and Queens* and Bennett's[58] *Five Centuries of Women and Gardens* and Horwood's[59] *Gardening Women: Their Stories from 1600 to the Present* are dedicated to the study of women in the garden and are an attempt to redress the imbalance. The interdisciplinary umbrella of 'garden history' also includes the fresh approaches adopted by, for example, *The Dumbarton Oakes Colloquium* and *Journal of Garden History* which have provided a platform for the work of Schenker and Bell, to whose work I also refer.

The notion of the garden as enclosure and retreat has generated a considerable amount of work, producing a number of texts which, in the main, place women within its confines. In *Green Retreats* Bending (2013),[60] for example, examines the part played by the garden in the lives of four prominent

[52] Bermingham, A. (1987) *Landscape and Ideology. The English Rustic Tradition, 1740-1860,* Thames and Hudson.
[53] Willis, M. (2014) *The Gardens of the British Working Class*, Yale University Press.
[54] Brown, J. (1999) *The Pursuit of Paradise. A social history of gardens and gardening* Omnia Books Ltd.
[55] Hoyles, M. (1991) *The Story of Gardening,* Journeyman Press.
[56] Bending, S. (2013) *Green Retreats: Women, Gardens and Eighteenth -Century Culture* Cambridge University Press.
[57] Way, T. (2006) *Virgins, Weeders and Queens*, Sutton Publishing.
[58] Bennett, S. (2001) *Five Centuries of Women and Gardens*, National Portrait Gallery.
[59] Horwood, C. (2010) *Gardening Women: Their Stories from 1600 to the Present,* Hachette Digital.
[60] Bending, S. (2013) ibid.

women in the eighteenth century when they were forced, or otherwise removed themselves, from public life. He focuses on case studies of four women: Elizabeth Montagu, Lady Mary Coke, Lady Caroline Holland and Henrietta Knight. However, a reading of women in the garden through a narrative of restriction and passivity provides only a partial view and I will argue that the garden is also a space where meanings are both made and contested.

Feminist geographers McDowell, Massey and Rose[61] have examined the garden from the perspective of cultural geography and argue that a 'masculinist geography'[62] has shaped not only the body of knowledge itself, but also the ways in which women are seen. In his introduction to the publication of papers from the conference organized by the Department of Geography at Edinburgh University, Philo[63] similarly pointed to an important shift in geographic discourse, which emphasised the cultural and social, creating an opportunity for a range of different perspectives to be heard, while Domosh and Seager[64] have created an awareness of the importance of the ways in which space is occupied and by whom. These ideas of place and space inform the representations of women in the garden to which I draw attention, reflecting social and cultural organisational structures.

Some of the most useful texts in the examination of the relationship of women to the domestic space of the garden are those which have not used the garden as their focus. Dewis, Page and Smith and Shteir[65] explore respectively the development of print culture, the role of botany in the lives of educated women, and the relationship of women to the domesticated landscape through literature. Dewis' focus

[61] Massey, D. (1994) *Space, Place and Gender*, Polity Press; McDowell, L (1999) *Gender, Identity and Place. Understanding Feminist Geographies*, Polity Press; Rose, G. (1993) *Feminism and Geography*, Polity Press.
[62] Rose, G. (1993) p.4.
[63] Philo, C. ed. (1991) *New Words, New Worlds: Reconceptualising Social and Cultural Geography,* Conference Proceedings, Department of Geography, University of Edinburgh 10-12 September 1991.
[64] Domosh, M. and Seager, J (2001) *Putting Women In Place*, The Guilford Press, New York and London
[65] Dewis, S. (2014) *The Loudons and the Gardening Press, A Victorian Cultural Industry,* web*;* Page, J.W. and Smith, E.L. (2011) *Women Literature, and the Domesticated Landscape. England's Disciples of Flora, 1780-1870*, Cambridge University Press and Shteir A.B. (1996) *Cultivating Women. Cultivating Science*. The John Hopkins University Press.

is on the gardening press of the Victorian period, and therefore indirectly the work of Jane Wells Webb Loudon, the subject of the second chapter of this thesis. Dewis demonstrates the ways in which Jane Loudon's editing of her magazines involved women in a broader discourse outside of the conventional feminine subjects. In their examination of women's literature between 1780 and 1870, Page and Smith view female participation in the garden as offering an opportunity to engage in more meaningful 'mental cultivation'[66] while Bilston's work[67], although focussing on the development of the suburbs, describes the contribution of the garden in promoting a particular kind of domesticity. All provide a useful context for this thesis.

1.4 Gender theory

The shift of feminist scholarship to a view which sees gender as far more fluid, constituted through discourse and everyday actions, informs this study and a brief discussion is necessary in order to position this thesis theoretically. This thesis assumes that femininity is a mutable construct; its meaning requires a continual re-working and representation forms a key site in which these negotiations take place. This study also recognises that there are many different ways of 'doing gender', that femininity is both historically and geographically distinctive and gender is also constituted by class and ethnicity and that there are many different ways in which these map together. This awareness underlines and acknowledges that the representations discussed in this thesis are of white middle class women. If, as de Lauretis[68] suggests, the subject is constructed through discourse, a continuing and ongoing interaction with the world that is characterisesd as experience then representation forms one aspect of these discourses. In this articulation, representation performs a dual function. On the one hand it is one of the many interactions which the subject may experience and on the other, it allows a subject to 'play' with existing discourses and recognize the fluidity of gender constructs and it is through representation

[66] Page, J.W. and Smith, E.L. (2011) p.172.
[67] Bilston, S. (2019) *The Promise of the Suburbs. A Victorian History in Literature and Culture,* Yale University Press.
[68] De Lauretis, T. (1984) *Alice Doesn't,* Indiana University Press. Bloomington.

that these discourses are made visible. The importance of the ways in which femininity is publicly articulated is reflected in the way that being female is subjectively experienced and it is this reciprocity which is mapped onto the space of the garden, reproduced and undermined.

I suggest that the representation of the female figure in the garden in each of the texts in this thesis works to destabilize accepted notions of femininity. In this study the representation of the woman in the garden is key to both supporting and subverting accepted gender constructs.

1.5 A perfect place for women and children

Miller notes that narrative and pictorial representations are 're-enactments of social expectations and limitations',[69] while Berger's seminal *Ways of Seeing*,[70] suggested that what we see and how we see it is mediated by the dominant visual regimes of the culture in which we live. Berger goes on to argue that the ways in which systems of gender relations are encoded in paintings and art forms (and I would add written text) reveal the social and political systems in which they are made. The implications of this work points to the ideological effects of the ways in which gardens and garden descriptions are (re)presented to the viewer.

The garden has been constructed as a 'neutral territory', a protected and unspoiled space which is considered removed from worldly concerns and where, historically, women may be suitably occupied and where they may remain unsullied by external affairs. Definitions of the garden as 'natural', however, ignore it as a site of more complicated power relationships and Bilston rightly argues, 'The garden's claim to "natural" status … works to depoliticize the activities of the women who operate in it'.[71] Making reference to Barthes' comment that, 'intentions [may be] hidden …. because they are

[69] Miller, J.E. (1994) *Rebel Women. Feminism, Modernism and the Edwardian Novel*, Virago Press, p. 5.
[70] Berger, J. (1976) *Ways of Seeing*, British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books.
[71] Bilston, S. (2019) p.122.

naturalized', Helmreich similarly notes that the garden is 'seemingly without politics'.[72] Berger had already pointed to the problems implicit in a definition of the garden as natural by quoting at length Lawrence Gowing's protest against Berger's own critique of the painting by Gainsborough of *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews*, where he suggests that the landscape represented is not neutral, but a demonstration of wealth and power. Gowing, by contrast, had argued that Mr. and Mrs Andrews were 'engaged in philosophic enjoyment of 'the great Principle … the genuine Light of uncorrupted and unperverted *Nature*'.[73] That the representation of the figures in a landscape may be ideological is again highlighted in the differing approaches of Berger and Kenneth Clark to Gainsborough's painting. Clark simply describes the painting as 'an enchanting work, painted with such love and mastery'[74] and sees it as an expression of 'the artist's Rousseauism'. By contrast, Berger challenged this reading of the painting, arguing that it was rather an expression of a way of seeing the world 'ultimately determined by attitudes to property and exchange [finding] their visual expression in the oil painting'.[75] Rose, in turn, maps another reading onto this painting by Gainsborough, arguing that, 'Landscape painting … involves not only class relations, but also gender relations'.[76] She argues that implicit in the painting is a description of Mr. Andrews as the owner of the land, who stands in marked contrast to his wife, who is depicted in 'frozen stillness … [consolidating] the argument that women were more 'natural' than men'.[77]

Berger's characterisation of a 'dominant visual regime', where 'women appear' but 'men act' is reflected not only in the way that the landscape itself is viewed but how women in are seen in this space. The division between public space and private space with the garden aligned with the private and domestic and the ascription of specific roles to each is reflected in a vocabulary which is reproduced in art and

[72] Helmreich, A. (2002) *The English Garden and National Identity. The Competing Styles of Garden Design, 1870-1914.* Cambridge University Press, p.2.
[73] Berger, J. (1976), p.107
[74] Clark, K. (1991) *Landscape Into Art*, John Murray, p.67.
[75] Berger, J. (1976), p.107
[76] Rose, G. (1993), p.198.
[77] Rose, G. (1993), p.198.

literature. These dominant visual regimes lead Cosgrove[78] to describe landscape painting as a form of 'visual ideology' in that the audience understands the image from the point of view of the landowner (for whom it was painted) and the perspective of the artist (male), rather than the perspective of the figures within it.

The idea that landscape imagery has an ideological function or that gardens may be read for political statements is further developed by a number of writers. At the very start of *The Story of Gardening* Hoyles makes the claim that his book 'is a challenge to the view that gardening has nothing to do with politics',[79] going on to demonstrate that from the development of the vast landscaped gardens designed by Capability Brown which relied on land enclosures, to the import of exotic species from overseas which depended on colonisation, the two are inextricably linked.[80] Through her own restoration of a garden, Laing[81] explores the patterns of privilege and exploitation on which many of Britain's 'great' gardens have been built. Bermingham[82] points to the ideological function of the rustic tradition of painting landscape which appeared at a time when the English countryside was changing rapidly and which, she argues, served to inscribe prevailing cultural values through artistic traditions. In her examination of the relationship between landscape and ideology she argues that landscape painting is not simply a reflection of social relations but offers the viewer an impression of real life conditions which serve to reinforce dominant values. The importance of the represented image is also stressed by Dodd who argues that '… a great deal of the power of the dominant version of Englishness … lay in its ability

[78] Cosgrove, D and Daniels, S. eds (1988) *The Iconography of Landscape*, Cambridge University Press.
[79] Hoyles, M. (1991) p.1.
[80] Other writers such as Raymond Williams (1965) *The Long Revolution*, Penguin Books notes that the creation of landscape imagery (landscaped gardens) is ideological. Similarly, W.T. Mitchell ed. (1994) in *Landscape and Power* University of Chicago Press, argues that all garden imagery presented on screen is ideological.
[81] Laing. O. (2024) *The Garden Against Time. In Search of a Common Paradise,* Picador.
[82] Bermingham, A. (1987) *Landscape and Ideology. The English Rustic Tradition, 1740-1860,* Thames and Hudson.

to represent itself'[83] and in *The Iconography of Landscape* geographers Daniels and Cosgrove[84] have similarly drawn attention to the ideological implications of landscape and make a case for the uses of landscape imagery in the shaping of national identities.[85] Referring to what they term the 'duplicity of landscape imagery' they examine the influence of theorists from Panofsky to Barthes, arguing that landscapes may be viewed as texts to be read for a multiplicity of meanings. Helmreich[86] also examines the social and political functions of landscape imagery and the ways in which larger identities are formed through and expressed in the garden. Using a wide range of contemporary material, Helmreich looks at the means by which the 'English' garden was shaped in opposition to what were seen as European influences. She stresses the use of imagery to the project of national identity and outlines the way in which Allingham's paintings, for example, fused the cottage garden idyll with a sense of Englishness, resting on a particular kind of domesticity which these images represented. According to Oakley and Mitchell, 'This idiom … has been impressed on the mind's eye through the years by vivid visual images … the thatched cottage with heavily scented bowers of honeysuckle and roses climbing round its porch'.[87] Garden images continued to feature strongly in British allegiances well into the twentieth century: by 1916, in the middle of the First World War, Constable's painting *The Haywain* was considered sufficiently typical of the English countryside that it featured in *Country Life* as an illustration of a way of life that serving British men were giving up their lives for. Although her subject is the children's book *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett, Morris makes the point that,

[83] Dodd, P. Englishness and the National Culture in Boswell, D. and Evans, J. (2005) *Representing the Nation: A Reader*, Routledge, p.88.
[84] Cosgrove, D, and Daniels, S. eds. ibid.
[85] See also, Slater, E. (2009) *The Postcolonial Landscape Aesthetic of the 'Quiet Man'*, NIRSA Working Paper Series No. 45 – February 2009; Bermingham, A. (1987) *Landscape and Ideology. The English Rustic Tradition, 1740-1860,* Thames and Hudson; Cosgrove, D. and Daniels, S. eds. (1988) *The Iconography of Landscape*, Cambridge University Press.
[86] Helmreich, A (2002) *The English Garden and National Identity. The Competing Styles of Garden Design, 1870-1914.* Cambridge University Press.
[87] Mitchell, J and Oakley, A. eds. (1977) *The Rights and Wrongs of Women*, Penguin, p.147.

'Garden images have articulated powerful notions of cultural and social identities, of who and what is to be included or excluded'.[88]

In the course of this study, I will refer to conventionally produced structures as ideological. It will be clear from my work, however, that 'ideology' here is not presented as a static or even stable concept, but one that contains contradictions and which changes over time. It is precisely these contradictions which allowed women like Jane Wells Webb Loudon to articulate through her writing the constraining effects of Victorian mores and simultaneously challenge these. This study builds on existing scholarship by examining the ways in which representations of the female figure in the garden can both articulate and undermine evolving gender ideologies. My discussion of 'the feminine' and 'femininity' draws on Barthes'[89] notion of myth and the ways in which myths are produced and reproduced in a range of media. In what I have described as 'conventional views', the ideological role of myth is obscured and representations become established. Structures of power are built into this system of making meaning which enable definitions to circulate and become dominant. Hall[90] uses Barthes' concept of myth to examine how representations work at a cultural level and argues that through the process of making meaning, meaning can also be contested. It is at this intersection of metaphor and practice that my thesis is located. By reassessing the objects of study and the figures within them, meaning can be redefined and new articulations allowed voice. Feminist interventions have allowed texts to be read differently and my aim here is that this work should expose the complex interaction which exists between women as they have been represented in the garden and the ways in which they have used this space and represented themselves. In this thesis I suggest that the garden is open to a polysemic reading, which enables a more complicated understanding of the representation of women in gardens

[88] Morris, M. S. (1996) *'"Tha'll be like a blush rose when tha' grows up, my little lass": English Cultural and Gendered Identity in 'The Secret Garden'*, Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 14.1: 59-78. P.59.
[89] Barthes, R. (1972) *Mythologies*, trans. A. Lavers. Jonathan Cape.
[90] Hall, S. ed. (1997) *Representation. Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Sage Publications with The Open University.

looking beyond convention and interrogating cultural practices and offering an alternative frame of reference.

1.6 Public and private

Historically the view of the domesticated landscape as central to women's lives has been reinforced by a public and theoretical discourse which suggests a division between private and public spaces. The conventional view of the woman in the garden is captured on screen, in text and in paint. The ideas articulated in Ruskin's lecture, *Of Queens' Gardens,* given by him in 1864, served to legitimize constructions of femininity in the nineteenth century. The physical containment of women in the private space of the home and their association with the natural was perfectly expressed by Ruskin in the lecture, where he claimed that women were best suited to the domestic environment. Men, he argued were creators and explorers, active in the creation of the world around them, while women were modest, discrete and passive creatures, to be revered for their ability to fashion homes, which were to be places of tranquillity and spiritual calm.[91] The notion of public and private spheres, reworked in varying degrees and nuances from the eighteenth century onwards, in which 'the world of productive labour, political decision, government, education, the law and public service … became exclusive to men' (Pollock, 1998)[92] finds its reflection in a domestic garden secluded from 'worldly' and thus 'modern' concerns. This does not mean that men were in turn excluded from the domestic, rather that men moved between the two spheres while women occupied only the domestic. O'Connell[93] describes this circumscription in more detail, arguing that the garden figured as a retreat for men, a private space for relaxation away from the demands of business while, for women, however, the garden could be as

[91] John Ruskin's essay 'Of Queen's Gardens' was originally given as a public lecture, before being published in his two-essay collection *Sesame and Lilies* (1865).
[92] Pollock, G. (1988) *Vision and Difference. Feminism, Femininity and the Histories of Art*, Routledge, p.95.
[93] O'Connell, R. (2017) *'Love Scenes and Garden Plots: form and femininity in Elizabeth von Arnim's Elizabeth and her German Garden'*. Retrieved on 25/04/2021 at https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Love-Scenes-and-Garden-Plots

constraining as the domestic environment of the house. From the late eighteenth century through the first half of the nineteenth century the domesticated landscape became increasingly central to the lives of middle-class women and the garden formed an extension of the home.[94] These spatial configurations have defined the ways in which the garden is constructed and the ways in which women have been typically represented in its space and inform each chapter of this thesis.

Although acknowledging the significance of this discussion of the home as a place of security, feminist geographers Massey, Rose and McDowell and Sharp,[95] offer an interpretation of the domestic environment as one which is more problematic. The importance of how spaces are constituted and their relevance to an analysis of gendered relations is perfectly articulated by McDowell and Sharp's introduction:

> Spatial relations and layout, the differences between and within places, the nature and form of the built environment, images and representations of this environment and of the 'natural' world, ways of writing about it, as well as our bodily place within it, are all part and parcel of the social constitution of gendered social relations and the structure and meaning of place.[96]

Arguing that a masculinist geography has defined the domestic environment for women as a place of safety, limited by social and physical boundaries, feminist cultural geography suggests instead that domestic space is open to challenge, providing fertile terrain from which to explore in more detail the meaning of the garden for women and a discussion to which I will return in the following chapters. In constructing the garden as a space of more complicated power relationships, this thesis references the work of feminist cultural geographers and theorizes the garden as a space of possibility rather than simply constraint.

[94] See Davidoff and Hall for a detailed discussion. Davidoff, L. and Hall, C. (1987) *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class*, Chicago University Press.
[95] Massey, D. (1994); McDowell, L. and Sharp. J.P. eds. (1997) *Space, Gender and Knowledge. Feminist Readings*, Arnold, London; Rose, G. (1993).
[96] McDowell, L. and Sharp. J.P. eds. (1997) p.3.

McDowell and Sharp point to the ways in which gendered social relations influence who is seen to be '"in place"' and who is "out of place"',[97] an argument which is suggestive of Douglas'[98] work, *Purity and Danger*, in which she argues that ideas of taboo are coding practices which create vocabularies of spatial limits. Douglas argues that what she describes as structures of pollution and purity in a community served to clarify moral and social boundaries, with the implication that 'matter out of place' was an anomaly and posed a threat to society and that the breaking of taboos has implications not only for the individual, but for the whole community. Page and Smith[99] have demonstrated how the home and garden in the nineteenth century was viewed as a source of morals, manners and gentility, for children and young women in particular, while Ruskin and Patmore brought the same sensibilities into the start of the twentieth century. In their hugely comprehensive study Davidoff and Hall[100] also describe how a well-ordered home was seen as the foundation of a civil society.[101] Thus women who stepped outside these boundaries might be viewed as 'matter out of place' and seen not only as a danger to themselves but a threat to the wider community. In her discussion of *Sexual Anarchy*, Showalter reformulates these ideas in terms of 'border controls' arguing that *fin de siècle* responses to cultural insecurities required that men and women 'be fixed in their separate spheres'[102] and breaches of these boundaries were to be viewed with suspicion at the least. The stigma attached to women who did not conform to prescriptions of space finds its reflection in the practice of Jane Loudon, who would not visit her publisher without her daughter or a male companion. The elision of the home and garden and notions of outside and inside and appropriate spaces have relevance to an analysis of the garden

[97] McDowell, L. and Sharp. J.P. eds. (1997) p.3.
[98] Douglas, M. (1966) *Purity and Danger*, Routledge.
[99] Page, J.W. and Smith, E.L. (2011) *Women Literature and the Domesticated Landscape, England's Disciples of Flora, 1780-1870,* Cambridge University Press
[100] Davidoff, L. and Hall, C. (1987) *Family Fortunes. Men and Women of the English Middle Classes 1780 – 1850,* Routledge.
[101] John Claudius Loudon himself was an ardent advocate of the home as a place of well-being and source of moral balance.
[102] Showalter, E. (1990) *Sexual Anarchy*, Viking, Penguin Books, p.4. As Showalter points out, these anxieties also extend to class and race as well as gender.

as an extended domestic space for women in terms of the individual experience and the renegotiation of boundaries.

Notions of scale and appropriate space are also evident in the work of Labbe.[103] In her discussion of Romanticism she argues that the notion of the sublime was constructed as an 'exclusively masculine experience',[104] in turn influencing the construction of the landscaped garden.

> The political landscape that made the 'improved' landscape garden a masculine province and associated it with his progeny, the public sphere, and political influence is represented in that garden by invoking unlimited ownership and unbroken views as well as a classically masculine education. The ha-ha … allow the eye to wander freely with no disturbing reminder that there existed any boundaries to its freedom…; artificially constructed eminences, opening up the garden's vistas.[105]

The larger landscaped garden, typified by the garden at Stowe (Fig. 1.2) for example, with its vistas, statues and grottoes would have required a knowledge of the classics to be fully appreciated, allying these aspects of design with the masculine and the 'rational mind' and with those who had the wealth and position to own land, sealing a distinction between the public realm of the male and the smaller domestic situation of women.

Fig. 1.2
Photograph of Stowe Park, Buckinghamshire, showing the Palladian Bridge and Gothic Temple

[103] Labbe, J. M. (1998) *Romantic Visualities. Landscape, Gender and Romanticism*, Macmillan Press Ltd.
[104] Labbe, J. M. (1998), p.40.
[105] Labbe, J. M. (1998), p68.

Available at:
https://commons.wikimedia.,
rg/w/index.php?title=File:Stowe_Park,_Buckinghamshire_(4663886537).jpg&oldid=712253744.
(Accessed 4 December 2022)

The garden at Stowe, designed chiefly by William Kent in the early 18th century, is full of classical and political allusions, which would not have been lost on visitors at the time. Constructions of femininity identified women (and the working class) as less able to grasp the general and conceptual; women were more comfortable with the detail and the particular.[106] In her extensive study *Reading in Detail. Aesthetics and the Feminine*, Schor raises the question, 'Is the detail feminine?'.[107] Like Labbe, she examines the way in which the expansive, larger view was deignated as masculine. The skills which were appropriate to women and through which they could demonstrate their femininity were by contrast, activities such as embroidery, collecting and pressing flowers or botanical illustration, what Page and Smith term 'work in a small compass'.[108]

1.7 Horticultural alignments

The dominant visual regime of the active male but passive female highlighted by Berger is evident in many of the paintings of women over the past century. A very brief overview[109] of some more well-known paintings illustrates the ways in which women have been represented in the garden, from engravings by Durer in the 16th century, through the paintings of the Romantic period and on into the work of the Pre-Raphaelites. In their adoption of Naturalism as the basis for much of their work the Pre-

[106] The ability to see the 'bigger picture' continues to be figured masculine.
[107] Schor, N. (2007) *Reading in Detail. Aesthetics and the Feminine*, Routledge, p.4. In a wide-ranging work, examining art, philosophy, literature and psychoanalysis Schor explores how the detail comes to be associated with a superfluity of object and is therefore bad; the ornamental is viewed as decadent and so certain styles, for example the oriental, were regarded as degraded and effeminate.
[108] Page and Smith, (2011), p.163.
[109] For a more comprehensive survey of women in art and art by women see Linda Nochlin, Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists? in Baker E. and Hess T. (1971*) Art and Sexual Politics* New York, (1971); Parker, R. and Pollock, G. (2003*) Old Mistresses. Women, Art and Ideology*, Bloomsbury Academic.

Raphaelites characteristically featured women surrounded by nature or flowers in some form with Waterhouse's work (Fig. 1.3) typical of the genre.

Fig. 1.3
Waterhouse, J.W. (1909) *Gather ye rosebuds while ye may*.
Available at:
https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=To_the_Virgins,_to_Make_Much_of_Time&oldid=1086619700
(Acc. 12 December 2022)

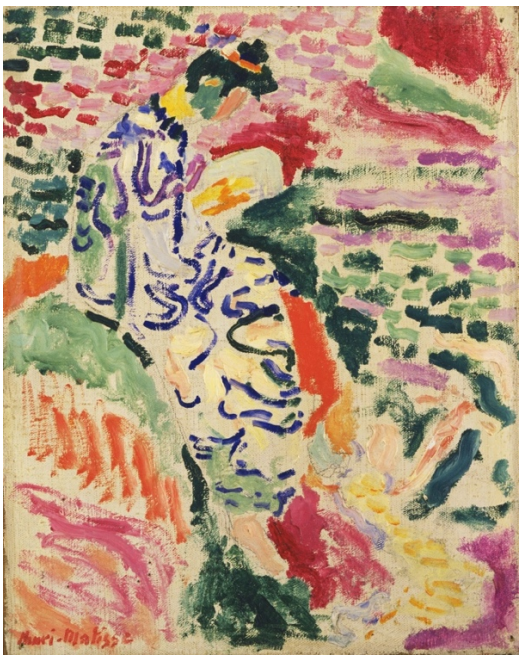

Fig. 1.4

Matisse, H. (1905) *La Japonaise. Woman beside water*.
Available at: wikiart.org/en/henri-matisse/woman-beside-the-water-1905
(Acc. 12 December 2022)

Even when not situated in the garden, female figures were frequently depicted surrounded by flowers and in Matisse's *La Japonaise* (Fig. 1.4) the figure of the woman merges almost completely with its flowery surroundings.

Fig. 1.5
Gauguin, P. (1891) *La Orana Maria*
Available at: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Paul_Gauguin_-_Ia_Orana_Maria_(Hail_Mary)_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg
(Acc. 12 December 2022)

Perhaps nowhere is the alignment of women with nature and the natural more evident than in Gauguin's paintings of the women in Tahiti, (Fig. 1.5) surrounded by flowers, fruit and vegetation, they are painted as part of the natural landscape itself, with clear implications of conquest and availability.

In their work Nochlin, Parker and Pollock each offer a detailed account of the ways in which art has traditionally aligned the female figure with nature, underlining the implicit sexuality of many of these images in which women are represented in woods and fields, often asleep, unselfconsciously permitting the spectator's gaze. Parker and Pollock argue that,

> …woman is body, is nature as opposed to culture, which, in turn, is represented by the very act of transforming nature, that is, the female model, or motif, into the ordered forms and colour of a cultural artefact.[110]

The 'topography of passivity and stillness'[111] that Rose identifies in her work are evident in paintings of women in the garden. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, with the growth of urban centres, the countryside came to signify a purity and a natural way of life in opposition to the perceived squalor and chaos of the city. Here the female figure in the garden represented a 'natural order'. The countryside and villages of England were painted as personifying the stability and harmony of a particular social order, one in which women feature strongly and to which gender ideology ascribed a central importance. While many images emphasized the alignment of women and nature in representations of female bodies, Nochlin draws attention to another aspect of the natural: the rural working mother. Country women such as Thomas Hardy's fictional Tess were associated with the land, viewed in terms of their bodies and reproductive capacities. Paintings of women in gardens, such as those by Helen Allingham[112] and her contemporaries, characterised an idealised countryside in which rural women and children were accorded a particular romanticism (Fig. 1.6) despite the manifest signs of poverty.

[110] Parker, R. and Pollock, G. (2013) *Old Mistresses. Women Art and Ideology*, Bloomsbury Academic p.119.
[111] Rose, G. (1993) p.95.
[112] Helen Allingham (1848-1926) was a good friend of Tennyson who expressed his idealised view of the countryside in his poetry.

Fig. 1.6
Allingham, H. (circa 1889) *Hillside Cottage*.
Available at:
http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/1051/
(Acc. 12 December 2022)

The association of modernity with freedom of movement, the city, consumption and spectacle has implications for the way in which domestic space is viewed. Although the perceived division between public and private spheres and women's exclusion from the former has received some criticism, the association of modernity and public space has relevance here. Constructed as a retreat from the rapid pace of city life and aligned with the house, the garden comes to be viewed as essentially conservative, a feminine space belonging to women. Domosh and Seager[113] trace the characterisation of cities as masculine spaces and the countryside as feminine to a coding which ascribed traits such as rationality to the urban while the countryside was associated with chaos and disorder, nature and the untamed.[114] They argue that the development of cities figured different spaces according to gender and that, if not compliant with prescribed norms, women could easily be seen as 'matter out of place'. This

[113] Domosh, M. and Seager, J. (2001) *Putting Women in Place. Feminist Geographers Make Sense of the World*, The Guilford Press.
[114] See also Elizabeth Wilson (1991) *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women,* University of California Press.

construction has informed the subsequent representation of the garden as a space of conventional values, as a repository of the past. In one of the few texts to discuss the representation of the countryside in film, Fish points out that it is the city which is seen to be a 'ubiquitous category[y] of experience' while the countryside and thereby the garden is 'lost to modernity'.[115] Examining the relationship of art and imagination to country, Harris claims that, 'Modernism had declared its allegiance to the waste land, not to the herbaceous border',[116] and she argues that the billowing borders of perennials designed by Gertrude Jekyll, for example, looked out of touch to a post war England as belonging, 'to a more innocent world'.[117] In her discussion of modernity and the spaces of femininity, Pollock[118] points to the exclusion of women from discourses of the modern, not only as sub[ob]jects, but as producers.[119] In essence, the act of gardening is perceived as an act of continuity, confirming its nostalgic character. By contrast, the city, with its associations of modernity, anonymity and ideas of freedom has been seen to be a space where women could enjoy new freedoms, relieved from the patriarchal constraints of domestic life. The alignment of the domestic garden with the space of the home has constructed it as a conservative space, one which identifies with the past and has little relation to the contemporary.

As Fish comments in his discussion of cinematic countrysides, scholarly interest in cinema has tended to focus on urban spaces as these have been perceived to reflect more perennial concerns. These oppositions can be seen not only in film but threaded through other texts. The opposition of the urban to the rural can be seen reflected in the differing ways that these spaces are experienced. The rural is

[115] Fish, R. ed. (2014) *Cinematic Countrysides*, Manchester University Press, p.6.
[116] Harris, A. (2015) *Romantic Moderns. English Writers, Artists and the Imagination from Virginia Woolf to John Piper,* Thames and Hudson, p.227.
[117] Harris, A. (2015), p.229.
[118] Pollock, G. (1988) *Vision and Difference*, Routledge.
[119] This exclusion extended to the acknowledgement of modernist female artists as recognised in a Royal Academy exhibition of pioneering work November 2022 to February 2023, who 'although less familiar than their male counterparts … were no less central to the development of radical new approaches to art in Europe'. Acc 24/11/22. https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/exhibition/making-modernism

suffused with nostalgia and ideas of retreat and peace while the urban is perceived as cosmopolitan, busy and replete with possibilities, both good and bad. Women have appeared less in these spaces of modernity.

However, I argue that rather than be seen to be a repository for conservative values, particularly in regard to the representation of women, the garden may also be seen as a space where conventional representations are subverted and even challenged. In the sense in which the garden contains a multiplicity of sites and shares a relationship to other spaces it may be described in Foucault's terms as a heterotopic space. Characteristically, heterotopic spaces are simultaneously both part of dominant culture while at the same time enabling challenges to it. Suggestive of Foucault's notion of heterotopia Pollock similarly draws attention to what she describes as 'interstitial spaces, the spaces of ambiguity'[120] and it is precisely this ambiguity and multiplicity which has enabled women to inhabit the space of the garden and at the same time to challenge conventional representations. However, in its identification with the rural context, the garden in cinema maintains a connection to the past and a rural idiom. The mise-en-scène of the garden with its emphasis on rest and repose suggests the continuation of the rural idyll with its connotations of womens' place and identification of the domestic garden as a feminine space.

At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, new decorative styles which challenged convention and experimented with different media, many of which were responding to the new urban centres, re-focused artistic energy away from the rural and the garden appears less and less. Between the two world wars, Modernist movements in all the arts responded to the experience of war and to social change. The garden appeared less often in the visual arts and representations of women emerged in other media such as advertising and film. In the inter-war paintings of Stanley

[120] Pollock, G. (1988), p.19.

Spencer (1891-1959) and Eric Ravilious (1903-1942) for example, where gardens are the subject, figures rarely appear and only rarely are they women.

With the release in the 1980s of a range of films, loosely labelled 'heritage films', the identification of the female figure in the garden as essentially backward-looking was reinforced. Images of herbaceous borders and landscaped gardens evoked a different era. Heritage films, which were critiqued as looking to the past, contributed to what a number of critics have called a nostalgic historical reimagining while those films which addressed the present were usually couched in the authentic grittiness of realism and largely located in urban environments. An overview of heritage film, where images of the garden reflect and refract a nostalgic past, demonstrates the extent to which women provide the subject matter for the films and the garden the background. Vincendeau[121] points out that women are central to the heritage genre both in terms of their role and also as the main audience. Two films which sit within this group of 'heritage cinema' and illustrate the way in which women are most frequently represented in the garden are *Maurice* (1987) and *A Room With A View* (1985) both directed by James Ivory.

Fig. 1.7
Mrs. Durham taking tea and writing letters in the garden.
Dir. James Ivory, *Maurice* (1987)

[121] Vincendeau, G. ed. (2001) *Film/Literature/Heritage*. A Sight and Sound Reader, BFI Publishing.

Written by E. M. Forster in 1914, the novel *Maurice* is set in Edwardian England and is the story of a love affair between two young men. Like many of Forster's other novels it is also a keen observation of gendered and classed manners. In the film the main action takes place between five locations: Pendersleigh Park, the home of the Durham family, Alfriston Gardens, the home of Maurice Hall and his family, Cambridge University and then Maurice's workplace and Clive Durham's London home. Alfriston Gardens is a substantial suburban villa (in the novel it is located in Penge). Writing to Mrs. Durham, Maurices's mother writes 'We are snug in our little home'. The house is only ever shown surrounded by tall shrubs, with the focus of the shot being upwards, eliminating any garden and emphasising the enclosing nature of the home. The remaining are all interior shots. Alfriston House is a middle class, suburban home occupied by a widow, her two daughters and son. There is a clear division here between public and private space with the emphasis on small, intimate shots of interiors which are occupied in the main by mother and daughters.

The location for Pendersleigh Park, the home of the Durham family, is Wilbury Park in Wiltshire, which was built in 1710 in the Neo-Palladian style. By contrast with the suburban villa, many of the shots of Pendersleigh Park take place in the surrounding parkland, the drive, mature trees and boating lake. Maurice is shown as he arrives at the house and he and Clive Durham are also later seen riding horses through the grounds. Mrs, Durham, her daughter and female guests are not seen outside the smaller enclosed environment of the house itself and immediate garden.

In a scene which does not feature in the novel itself, so is developed exclusively for the purposes of the film, Mrs. Durham is shown taking tea in the garden and writing letters (Fig. 1.7). She is seated on wicker outdoor furniture in a bower, or arbour, surrounded by the paraphernalia of china teacups, napkins and a cake stand. Surrounding Mrs. Durham are the twining stems of climbing roses and, in the background, the flower borders laid out in the less formal style of the garden designers William Robinson (1838 – 1935) and Gertrude Jekyll (1843 -1932), and popular at the beginning of the

twentieth century. Low box borders contain flowering plants, mainly white to complement the pale colouring of the ladies' dresses. The garden shown in this scene is not the larger landscaped garden of extended vistas, temples and sweeping woodland depicted elsewhere in the film. Into this scene arrive the Durham's daughter, the nurse pushing a baby in a perambulator and another female guest. They walk through the box-bordered pathway between the flowerbeds to greet Mrs. Durham, who, having completed her letter writing, rises to welcome them. This is presented as an essentially 'feminine' scene: enclosure, retreat and detail rather than spectacle. And then, from the bottom left, Alec Scudder, the gardener and also Maurice's lover, enters the frame. This is done in such an evidently awkward manner in the shot that it emphasizes how out of place he is in this environment: not only male, but working class. His 'out of placeness' is rendered more emphatic by his dark clothes. He appears to be the person who carries out a lot of the maintenance work which, as he later points out to Maurice, includes delivering Mrs. Durham's letters to the post office. The garden in the film is not simply an attractive background, it places women and the working class firmly within ascribed boundaries.

The composition of this scene is important. With Mrs. Durham placed centrally within the frame, the viewer is offered a balanced composition reminiscent of the paintings of Monet and the Impressionists. The ways in which women occupy space, whether it be within the enclosed frame of a painting or in the represented physical space of the garden, is significant. In her discussion of the male gaze, Mulvey suggests that the presence of conventional representations of the female figure in film, 'tends to work against the development of a story-line, to freeze the flow of action'.[122]

While other people enter and exit the scene, it is Mrs. Durham who holds the attention. Mrs. Durham is shown sitting in a bower, or arbour, an enclosed space designed and regarded as suitable for women. It is traditionally planted with roses and scented plants to make the experience of being in the garden a

[122] Mulvey, L. (1989) *Visual and Other Pleasures,* Macmillan, p.19.

sensory and pleasant one. Apart from providing the 'backdrop' to the writing of the letter, the scene is unnecessary to the narrative of the film. Long shot framing in the film is reserved for the grounds of Pendersleigh Place when the two young men go horse riding together, or as Maurice arrives in the carriage for the first time. In both cases these are scenes dominated by men and their activity. Women are displayed passively in the garden or at the dinner table. The visual vocabulary of the female figure in the garden is well-established. In film, the landscape is male territory, to be traversed and dominated while the domestic garden is a space for women, which they occupy passively.

Gardens as domestic spaces were typically associated with the feminine sphere of influence, a connection reinforced by the frequent equivalence made between women and flowers throughout Victorian culture and emphasized through Mrs. Durham's letter writing. Pidduck comments that 'letters and letter-writing are part of the recurring tropes in the visual imaginary of costume drama',[123] while Vidal adds that 'The letter motif also articulates contemporary discourses on gender, class, and individuality …a pleasure reserved to those who can afford the cost of materials'.[124]

A Room with A View, written by Forster in 1908, describes a young woman struggling with the constraints of the period. Set in both England and Italy it begins with the young woman, played by Helen Bohnam-Carter, touring Italy with an older relative where she meets a free-spirited young man, George Emerson. Back in England she is courted by the wealthy Cecil Vyse, who contrasts sharply with George in attitude and approach to life as well as social class. Made into a film by the Merchant Ivory team, like the novel itself, the film observes Edwardian attitudes towards class, women and differences between cultures. The gardens in these films are invariably presented as innocent environments, bathed in warm light and the frame for light activities such as badminton or reading. The natural is

[123] Pidduck, J. Of Windows and Country Walks: Frames of Space and Movement in 1990s Jane Austen Adaptations, *Screen 394*, Winter 1998, p.14.
[124] Vidal, B. (2012) *Heritage Film. Nation, Genre and Representation*, Columbia University Press, p.272.

positioned in opposition to artifice.[125] On one occasion the young men are shown bathing naked in a pool, surrounded by grasses and flags and shadowed by trees and speckled sunlight. The scene is presented as one of artless naivety and even when they are disturbed by the women walking past the discovery is presented as humourous, rather than a disaster.

Fig. 1.8
Mrs. Honeychurch in the garden.
Dir. James Ivory, *A Room With A View* (1985)

The garden in *A Room With A View* is presented as a space for innocent and healthy activities and Lucy Honeychurch is shown playing badminton in the garden, scrapping with her brother or taking tea on the lawn with family and friends. Mrs. Honeychurch, helped by her elderly relative, are shown in the garden cutting roses (Fig. 1.8). Wearing long dresses in the style of the period and hats trimmed with lace, the women are not wearing garments appropriate to anything but the lightest of garden activities.

The romanticism of the flower borders where Mrs. Durham is seated, or where Mrs. Honeychurch is seen cutting roses typify the personal, imaginative and emotional qualities associated with women.

[125] It is interesting how these this visual vocabulary continues to inform the presentation of gardens in film. In *I Am Love* (2009, dir. Luca Guadagnino) the confined and restricted world of Emma Recchi, who has married into a wealthy industrial family, is contrasted with the sundrenched hillsides and natural vegetation surrounding Milan where she increasingly comes to feel she can be herself.

These scenes reinforce the presentation of gender through their positioning of the activity within the garden. The visual vocabulary of the garden is already established through the alignment of women with nature and the natural and with the small and the domestic and serves to illustrate how women are represented in the space of the garden.

While the texts I have referred to provide valuable historical context in the shape of the garden and horticultural practice, none explicitly links gardens and the representation of women, or explores the ideological implications of this association. The horticultural alignments of the female figure and a vocabulary which reinforces those alignments is reflected across a range of media. My thesis points to ways in which the space of the garden may also be used to create representations of women which challenge and subvert the 'prison house'[126] of meaning. I suggest that an analysis of the representation of the woman in the garden and challenges to that representation remain of continuing relevance in exposing conventionally produced structures of understanding.

[126] Pollock, G. (1988) *Vision and Difference. Feminism, Femininity and the Histories of Art*, Routledge

Chapter Two. Gardening for Ladies: The horticultural writing of Jane Wells Webb Loudon

Fig. 2.1
Portrait of Jane Loudon, née Webb, as a young woman. Anon.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jane_Loudon_crop.jpg
(Acc. 15 December 2019)

2.1 Introduction

From the end of the eighteenth century through to the late nineteenth century the role of horticultural knowledge, gardens and plants became increasingly important to definitions of femininity and what were seen as appropriate forms of knowledge for women. Ann Shteir[127] has explored in her illuminating work the role that botany played in the lives of middle and upper-class women, but there is less academic discussion of horticulture. Botany is defined as the scientific study of plants, while horticulture (which may include botany) is more concerned with their management and cultivation. This chapter focuses on the work of Jane Wells Webb Loudon and specifically on her horticultural writing and the ways in which it framed femininity. Of Jane Loudon's[128] prolific output, which included one novel, books

[127] A. Shteir, A. (1996) *Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science. Flora's Daughters and Botany in England. 1760 to 1860.* John Hopkins University Press; Botany and the Breakfast Room *in Pnina G. Abir-Am and Outam, D. eds. Uneasy Careers and Intimate Lives: Women and Science 1789-1979,* (1987) New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press; Women and Plants – a Fruitful Topic Vol.6 No 2.
[128] I use the name Jane Loudon to distinguish her work from that of her husband, John Claudius Loudon.

on poetry and also those aimed at children, horticulture formed the largest proportion of the work that she produced and it is this which has attracted the least attention from scholars. Although she worked closely with her husband to publish a range of magazines and books on gardening, for the purposes of this research, the focus will be on the horticultural writing that she wrote and published or edited herself.

There is some recognition of Jane Loudon's work, but it has generally received little attention and even less has been devoted to her horticultural writing, despite her popularity in the nineteenth century. Although there is little in the way of historical record available, there is nevertheless some information through which her biography may be traced, her career re-created and her work contextualised. In this chapter I will show how Jane Loudon's publications, working within the constraints of a largely male and conservative media, facilitated the dissemination of horticultural knowledge to women and encouraged a degree of physical activity not generally associated with prevailing definitions of femininity. In using the space of the garden, she constructs the woman as active, informed and engaged. I suggest that the horticultural writing of Jane Loudon presents the garden as a space in which women were able to actively participate and also a platform from which women were able to engage with a wider social and political discourse.

In the first part of this chapter, I briefly describe Jane Loudon's life and the way in which her own experience and knowledge informed the development of her views and her horticultural writing. I then situate her writing in the context of the mid-nineteenth century and in the third part of the chapter I examine her horticultural writings themselves and the way in which they represent femininity in the garden. I conclude by considering to what extent Jane Loudon uses the space of the garden to subvert conventional views of femininity.

2.2 Jane Wells Webb Loudon: a life

Howe's book, *Lady with Green Fingers. The life of Jane Loudon*[129] is the most detailed account of the life of Jane Loudon available and has provided the basis for some of the work carried out by others.[130] It gives an indication of the kinds of circles in which the Loudons moved, their lives together and the difficulties Jane Loudon faced in securing continuing work and an income on the death of her husband. Howe's work is referred to by a number of other authors, possibly because of the access she has gained to limited material. Two other key texts which give an indication of the life of Jane Loudon are Simo's book, *Loudon and the Landscape. From Country Seat to Metropolis, 1783-1843*[131] and Dewis' *The Loudons and the Gardening Press: A Victorian Cultural Industry.*[132]

Simo's work is a comprehensive overview of the life and work of John Claudius Loudon, detailing his influences and upbringing, political convictions, designs for public and private spaces and his interactions with his contemporaries and engagement with contemporary issues. The chapter entitled, 'At Home in Bayswater' deals with his relationship and marriage to Jane Webb and, in doing so, looks at the contribution she made to the garden at their home in Porchester Terrace and to Loudon's own publications as well as to supporting their family life together. Like others Simo refers to Howe's work for some of the detail she includes. As might be expected from a study of John Loudon, less is written about the work of Jane Loudon herself, but the study provides important information on the principles which guided their writing and the ideas with which they engaged, key material in considering the influences on her own writing and her thoughts on the role of gardening in the lives of women.

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[129] Howe, B. (1961) *Lady with Green Fingers. The life of Jane Loudon,* London, Country Life Limited.
[130] See Moody, N. Gardening in Print: Profession, Instruction and Reform in *Nineteenth Century Gender Studies*, Issue 5.2 (Summer 2009); Sheffield, S le M. Gendered Collaborations. Marrying Art and Science in Shteir A. and Lightman B. (2206) *Figuring It Out. Science, Gender and Visual Culture*, Dartmouth College Press, and also Schenker, H. Women, Gardens and the English Middle Class in Conan, M. ed. (2002) *Bourgeois and Aristocratic Cultural Encounters in Garden Art, 1550-1850,* Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Washington D.C. for example.
[131] Simo, M. L. (1988) *Loudon and the Landscape. From Country Seat to Metropolis, 1783-184,* Yale University Press, New Haven and London.
[132] Dewis, S. (2016) *The Loudons and the Gardening Press, A Victorian Cultural Industry,* Routledge. Electronic.

Mention is made of Jane Loudon's life and publications in the work of some other writers, particularly when the subject is female gardeners. For example, in her book, Way explores the involvement of women in the garden historically. She comments that 'The indefatigable, if occasionally overshadowed, Jane Loudon (1807-58) burst into ladies' gardening in 1840 and continued to dominate until her death almost twenty years later'[133]. A little later Way notes the success of Webb Loudon's publications: 'On the first day alone, 1,350 copies of *Instructions in Gardening for Ladies* were sold and within the first year it went into three editions'.[134] This popularity, however, has not received a great degree of historical recognition, despite the fact that her work was also published in America and France, where she also received commendations[135]. Similarly, Hoyles notes that 'It is remarkable that Jane Loudon's work has been so neglected'.[136] Despite the fact that she was clearly a significant figure in her own time[137], in books on the subject of garden history, Jane Loudon is mentioned, but not considered in any detail and often only as her husband's 'amanuensis'.[138]

There are a number of accounts, most often footnotes to a broader discussion, which include details of Jane Loudon's early life and her meeting with John Claudius Loudon[139] and there is some merit in

[133] Way, T. (2006) p.137.
[134] Way, T. (2006) p.137
[135] In *The Pursuit of Paradise. A Social History of Gardens and Gardening* (1999), Routledge, Jane Brown notes that 'The Loudons' work was taken to America' where it 'filtered into the liberal intelligentsia' and suggests that Jane Loudon's work found fertile ground here providing the foundations for women to study, train and have careers in gardening. Simo points out that Jane Loudon's work was held in the Bibliothèque Nationale in France and there she was also made a corresponding member of the Royal Horticultural Society of Paris in January 1844 (Simo, 1988:278).
[136] Hoyles, M. (1995) *Bread and Roses*, Pluto Press.p.95.
[137] How well known Jane Loudon was is illustrated by Lightman in *Victorian Popularizers of Science*. Referring to an anonymous writer for the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* in 1850 he notes that she is included in a list as one of the foremost writers of the period.
[138] See Helmreich, A. (2002) *The English Garden and National Identity*, Cambridge University Press, p172. Willis, M. (2014) *Gardens of the British Working Class*, Yale University Press, pp179-181. Hoyles, M. (1991) *The Story of Gardening,* Journeyman Press pp 205-205. Bennett, S. (2001) *Five Centuries of Women and Gardens,* National Portrait Gallery, p98,99. Nickianne Moody's Gardening in Print: Profession, Instruction and Reform in *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies,* Issue 5.2 (Summer 2009) may be considered an exception to the rule, but again, a significant portion of this article describes the work of John Claudius Loudon.
[139] This was described in John Loudon's *The Suburban Gardener and Villa Companion* (1838).

rehearsing these here, as they give an indication of the resilience which she displayed in later life and may have played a part in the formation of her views. Jane Webb was born in 1807 to a Birmingham businessman, Thomas Webb.[140] According to Simo, she was encouraged to study from an early age and, when her mother died in 1819 when Jane was twelve years old, she and her father travelled through Europe for a year enabling her to improve on her language skills and, on their return, she became housekeeper.[141] However, not long afterwards Thomas Webb's fortune evaporated as a result of over-speculation and he died penniless in 1824, when Jane was 17 years old and it was then she decided that 'it would be necessary for me to do something for my support'.[142] With few respectable opportunities for earning money, Jane Webb published some poetry and prose[143] and then, in 1827, she published her science fiction novel *The Mummy*! *Or a Tale of the Twenty-Second Century.* Although not as popular as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, a contemporary of hers, *the novel* received good reviews and is today regarded as one of several pioneering science fiction works authored by women.

In The Mummy Jane Webb had written about the improved farming implements of her imagined twenty-second century, and the book was reviewed in *The Gardener's Magazine*, a popular periodical edited by John Claudius Loudon. On the basis of the ideas found in the book, John Loudon arranged a meeting with the author, who he assumed was male. Loudon evidently overcame his surprise that the author was female and the couple went on to marry in 1830, despite an age difference of 24 years. By

[140] Books and encyclopaedia entries include no information about her mother, not even Simo's extensive biography.

[141] The experience of being a young housekeeper in a house in the country with few resources found its way into *The Lady's Country Companion: or How to Enjoy a Country Life Rationally* (London: Longman, 1845) where Jane Loudon 'writes' to her reader: 'No one but a young housekeeper in a similar situation can have any idea of what I suffered … The lesson, however, was not lost on me; and you may imagine that ever afterwards I took care to have a cooked piece of hung beef, or ham, in the house'.

[142] Simo, M.L. (1988) p. 32.

[143] *Prose and Verse*, published in 1824 and privately printed includes four stories which are 'free translations from French, German, Italian and Spanish sources' (Howe, 1961:32) which attests to her mastery of the languages.

the time of their meeting John Loudon was already a popular and established writer on horticulture, publishing numerous books and editing a number of journals. They settled at 3 Porchester Terrace, Bayswater, which he had designed and had built in 1823. The house was planned as a 'double detached Suburban Villa' – two small houses, constructed to appear as one building with a central domed conservatory. This double detached villa served a dual purpose: the property adjoining the Loudon's housed John Loudon's elderly and ailing mother and his sisters.

Surrounded by a glass roofed verandah, the house also contained the *Gardener's Magazine* offices, which looked over the gardens and hothouses which were central to much of the writing of both husband and wife.[144] In the early years of the marriage, Jane Loudon supported her husband in his writing as well as acting as housekeeper for the two households and cultivating the gardens to the standard required for John Loudon's botanic research. She worked closely with him on the *Gardener's Magazine* and educated herself in botany by attending Lindley's lectures, later writing up her notes as articles for the magazine, contributing these under her own initials 'J.W.L'. In *Botany and the Breakfast Room,* Shteir[145] argues that the family network was a critical factor in the writing career of many women science writers. 'The family was the institution through which women could learn botany … taught by family networks and brought into family projects,'.[146] Fathers, brothers or husbands often provided a 'formative influence'.[147] Shteir's focus is on botany and the part it played in the lives of women from the eighteenth century into the nineteenth, but her comments are equally applicable to the horticultural writing and experience of Jane Loudon. Shteir highlights the home as the locus of learning and, often

[144] Commenting on the expenditure required to furnish an extensive garden, Floud notes that in 1830 the greenhouse at Porchester Terrace contained eighty-two plants and the garden 600 species of alpines, with far more trees and shrubs. In the *Suburban Gardener*, pp, 342-347 Loudon himself had written that 'Had we confined ourselves to herbaceous plants, instead of growing 2000 species at one time, we might have had 10,000 in our limited space'.

[145] Shteir, A. Botany and the Breakfast Room *in Pnina G. Abir-Am and Outram, D. eds. Uneasy Careers and Intimate Lives: Women and Science 1789-1979,* (1987) New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press.

[146] Shteir. A (1987) p.41.

[147] Shteir. A (1987) p.38.

for these middle-class women, the place of work. This was particularly the case with the Loudons in the way the home was physically structured, the offices it housed and the experimental gardens used for research and observation. In *Gendered Collaborations: Marrying Art and Science* Sheffield[148] similarly examines the role of the home in supporting women's work in science subjects and explores the nature of what she describes as 'productive marriage partnerships in art and science',[149] using the Loudons as one of her examples.[150] John Loudon's sisters also contributed to the work, particularly when his health began to deteriorate and debts mounted up; a comment of Jane Loudon's from the *Life of John Loudon* is illustrative, 'To us who saw the state of his health, […] we determined to do everything in our power to prevent the necessity of his exerting himself. Two of his sisters learned wood-engraving; and I, […] began to write books on those subjects myself'.[151]

John Loudon himself was a phenomenally hard worker: in 1832–3 the *Encyclopaedia of Cottage, Farm, and Villa Architecture*, was published which contained over 1,000 pages of text, 2,000 woodcuts and 100 lithographs, while at the same time he was editing four magazines. According to Simo, '"The labour"', Jane recalled, '"was immense; and for several months he and I used to sit up the greater part of the night".[152] John Loudon's attention to detail came at a cost: his 'great and ruinous work' *Arboretum et Fruticetum Brittanicum*, was published at his own expense in 1838 and despite some of the costs being allayed by Jane Loudon acting as scribe and secretary, it left them £10,000 in debt.[153]

[148] Sheffield, S. Le-May Gendered Collaborations: Marrying Art and Science in Lightman, B. and Shteir, A. (2006) *Figuring It Out. Science, Gender and Visual Culture,* Dartmouth College Press.
[149] Sheffield, S. (2006) p.242.
[150] Although her focus is on single women, Martha Vicinus in her study *Independent Women* (1985) University of Chicago Press, notes the insecure position of the single woman in the middle of the nineteenth century and likewise points to the way in which families were enabling factors in the lives of professional working women.
[151] Webb Loudon (1845) *Account of the Life and Works of John Claudius Loudon* which appeared as A Forward to *Self-Instruction for Young Gardeners* by John Claudius Loudon, Longmans. Pxl.
[152] Simo, M.L. (1988) p. 55. Their daughter, Agnes, was born in 1832, so in addition to her husband's and her own work, Jane Loudon was also now responsible for child care.
[153] Dewis (2016) p. 208.

Dewis suggests that Jane Loudon began to publish independently of her husband in an attempt to meet some of the expenses incurred.

Other accounts suggest that while assisting John Claudius with his work, it had become evident to Jane Loudon that there was a need for gardening manuals which were written in a straightforward manner and could be directed at the growing middle-class market of women readers.[154] In the introduction to *Instructions in Gardening for Ladies* she writes: 'I think books intended for professional gardeners, are seldom suitable to the wants of amateurs. It is so very difficult for a person who has been acquainted with a subject all his life, to imagine the state of ignorance in which a person is who knows nothing of it'[155]. With support from John Lindley[156], who she had already got to know through attendance at his lectures on horticulture, she published *The Ladies' Flower-Garden of Ornamental Annuals* in 1839 (to be reprinted again in 1840), *Instructions in Gardening for Ladies in 1840, followed by The Ladies' Companion to the Flower-Garden* in 1841.[157] Already an invalid when Jane Loudon married him, John Loudon died in 1843. The losses incurred by his project to publish the *Arboretum* continued into his wife's widowhood and although wealthy and influential friends such as Lindley and Paxton endeavoured to help, letters to her publisher, John Murray, reveal her anxieties and Dewis writes that 'the high productivity of the decade from 1838 to 1848 demonstrates the financial pressures Webb Loudon was under in order to pay off the debt from the Arboretum and as a widow from 1843, to support the extended family'.[158] Jane Loudon published her husband's final work, *Self-Instruction for Young Gardeners*, together with a biography in 1845 and she continued to edit and publish his books

[154] Dewis (2016), Easley (2019), Poovey (1984) and Beetham (1996) all document the huge increase in the periodical press, writing for women and a growing female readership over this period.
[155] Loudon, J. (1840) p vi.
[156] John Lindley (1799 – 1865) was a foundational member of the RHS, lecturing in botany and elected to prominence at Kew Gardens and Chelsea Physic Garden. John Loudon had worked closely with Lindley on his work *Encyclopaedia of Plants.*
[157] Her *First Book of Botany* was also published in 1841.
[158] Dewis, (2016) p 208. Jane Loudon continued to support her husband's mother and sisters. With the support of John Lindley she was granted an Annual Civil List pension by the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel.

after his death, as well as a number of her own, while still editing journals. She died at her home in 1858 and was buried with her husband.[159]

2.3 Associations and influences

According to Dewis and Simo[160] the Loudons were part of an intellectual circle which included Charles Dickens[161], William Makepiece Thackeray, Harriet Martineau, Charles Drysdale, Catherine Crowe and Mrs. Gaskell. The nature of this circle is important when considering Jane Loudon's own political position and affiliations. The less well-known Catherine Crowe[162] (1803 – 1876) was a writer and playwright whose plots centred around the plight of middle-class women in unhappy marriages and at the mercy of their husbands. Charles Drysdale (1829 – 1907) was an engineer, physician and public health scientist and friend of Charles Darwin. Drysdale was a supporter of birth control and later he and his partner, Alice Vickery, were witnesses for the defence of Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant during their 1877 trial for the publication of their pamphlet which advocated birth control. Harriet Martineau (1802-1876), regarded as something of a radical, came to prominence as a writer who contributed to debates around the 'woman question' through her fiction and journalism. Simo refers to a reviewer in the *Gentleman's Magazine* known as J.M. who had spent some time in the Loudon's company,

> '"whoever was a guest at [Loudon's] table, was sure to be gratified by the company of persons of superior intelligence and information; of naturalists, travellers, men conversant with literature, or art, or science, of various characters and pursuits…'".[163]

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[159] An affectionate obituary to her in Dickens's magazine *Household Words* read, 'no one had done so much to make beautiful gardens possible to the weakest hands and the smallest incomes; no one has taught so genially or so well how to cultivate them with intelligence'. (Howe, 1961:139).

[160] Additionally, Sue Young in Sue Young Histories.com includes Charles Darwin and Charlotte Bronte in this circle, although on what evidence is unclear.

[161] Dewis points out that John Loudon's notion of the importance of the garden in benefitting 'health, enjoyment and respect', detailed in his work *The Suburban Gardener*, was reflected in Charles Dickens' *Pickwick Papers,* each published almost concurrently: *The Suburban Gardener* ran from June 1837 to August 1838 and the serialised *Pickwick Papers* ran from March 1836 to October 1837.

[162] According to Howe, Catherine Crowe had lived for a while with the Loudons while she was experiencing personal difficulties and was good friends with Agnes.

[163] Simo, M.L. (1988) p 274.

John Loudon was also an associate of Jeremy Bentham, with whom he worked closely and whose views on reform he shared and, despite an earlier dispute played out in the pages of their respective magazines, Joseph Paxton and he also became firm friends. Many of these associates were sympathetic to, if not actively involved in, the Chartist and Owenite movements. John Loudon himself embraced the principles of Owenism and his horticultural work clearly championed ideas of universal suffrage and an educated electorate.

An interesting entry in a book by Camilla Newton Crosland (1893), *Landmarks of a Literary Life: 1820–1892* gives more detail of the kind of life led by the Loudons at Porchester Terrace. Newton Crosland describes Jane Loudon as 'a friend of some celebrity' and 'Distinguished as a writer of fiction'.

> Mrs Loudon moved much in literary society and gathered many notable people around her. Her receptions in Porchester Terrace, which were frequent in "the season" and occasional in the winter, were very agreeable meetings. There was very little ceremony and no exactions of dress.[164]

She describes a welcoming and open atmosphere. Crosland got to know Jane Loudon two years after the death of her husband, so it is evident that the social circle in which they moved and lifestyle to which they had been accustomed, including staging plays in their home, continued after his death and not wholly reliant on his position. It appears that the sociability enjoyed by the Loudon's was not simply dependent on John Loudon himself.[165] Although Dewis, for example, is sceptical of Jane Loudon's own position on reformist principles, it is hardly likely that she would have been ignorant of and in opposition to the ideas debated in her drawing room. Thompson similarly argues that:

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[164] Newton Crosland, C. (1893) *Landmarks of a Literary Life: 1820–1892* London: Sampson Low, Marston Source: Internet Archive, accessed 10.11.2021. archive.org. Page 184. Additionally, John Leech 1817-1829, one of the illustrators of Charles Dickens *A Christmas Carol* and *Punch* was also part of the social group, as were Douglas Jerrold (1803-1857) playwright and journalist. Mrs. Gaskell's father Mr. Stevenson was a friend of John Loudon's. Howe also notes that Charles Landseer was 'her most loyal friend and confidant' after her husband's death, accompanying her to the theatre and floral exhibitions. (Howe, 1961:98).

[165] According to Howe, however, as a result of financial constraints, Jane Loudon was forced to eventually rent out the properties at Porchester Terrace and to take up lodgings with Agnes elsewhere. It is not clear whether these social gathering continued to take place.

> Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century there was passionate discussion and agitation on matters such as marriage and divorce laws, women's property and custody rights, and educational and employment opportunities for women … It was impossible for educated people not to be aware of such developments and not to form opinions and take a stance.[166]

It is evident that discussion of the 'woman question' permeated discourse at a range of levels, not only in the drawing rooms of intellectual circles, but at other levels of society and that the print media enabled the dissemination of these ideas. Shevelow[167] and Beetham,[168] for example, suggest that at times when the category of 'femininity' shifts and becomes more elusive, the women's periodical press becomes more important as it emphasises the ideal form that femininity should take. Brake, Bell and Finkelstein[169] extend this argument by claiming that the nineteenth century periodical is an important medium for study 'not least because of the way in which producers of print were to assume, and at times to dictate, particular audience values'.[170] Although the focus of their work is on the women's magazine more generally, the shifting emphases on representations of femininity are reflected in the pages of Jane Loudon's work. Its publication in serialised format in addition to the *Magazine*, enabled it to extend to a wider audience.

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[166] Thompson, N.D. (2003) *Victorian Women Writers and the Woman Question*, Cambridge University Press. P.3.

[167] Shevelow, K. (2014) *Women and Print Culture. The Construction of Femininity in the Early Periodical,* Routledge.

[168] Beetham, M. (1996) *A Magazine of Her Own. Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine, 1800-1914*, Routledge.

[169] Brake, L. Bell, B. and Finkelstein, D. (2010) *Nineteenth Century Media and the Construction of Identities,* Palgrave. Essays included in this selection provide a good overview of the role which print media can play in the construction of identities, from Jones work on Welsh national identity and Finkelstein on Scottish identity to Turner and the 'Project of Masculinities'. They suggest that 'through subtle modulation and transformation, [print journalism] was able to both to reflect and to mediate social consciousness throughout the long nineteenth century' (2010:3). A number of other writers note the importance of the periodical as a structuring influence in the early nineteenth century. Fraser, Green and Johnstone, cover similar ground, suggesting that 'the medium that most readily articulates the unevenness and reciprocities of evolving gender ideologies is the periodical press…' (Fraser, Green and Johnstone, 2003:7).

[170] Brake, L. Bell, B. and Finkelstein, D. (2010) p.3.

2.4 Only an amateur

The lack of formal educational opportunities for women served to exclude them from the prospect of achieving any form of independence and the network of support provided by family members to middle class women was therefore instrumental in supporting individuals who, like, Jane Loudon, needed to, or chose to, earn an income. In his discussion of women writers of science, Lightman argues that men drew on their authority as clergymen and as experts in their field, but 'women did not have this option'.[171] Although working class women had been weeders, sweepers and caterpillar pickers for centuries, horticultural practice excluded women in a professional capacity. Women could be amateurs and enthusiasts in their subject, but not professionals earning an income.[172] Despite the increasing involvement of women in some kind of gardening activity throughout the nineteenth century, this continued to be viewed as a pastime or yet another polite accomplishment to be added to a lady's portfolio.[173] Of course, there is a lengthy list of upper class women who left a considerable gardening legacy: Alice de Rothschild, Lady Dorothy Neville, Lady Anne Monson, Mary Delaney, Christian Ramsay, to name but a few and in his substantial monograph Bending[174] also brings together women and gardens, examining the part played by the garden in the lives of four prominent women in the eighteenth century: Elizabeth Montagu,[175] Lady Caroline Holland, Lady Mary Coke, Henrietta Knight and Lady Luxborough. It is evident that these women were passionate about gardening and the plants

[171] Lightman, B. (2007) *Victorian Popularizers of Science,* Dartmouth College Press, p.96.

[172] According to Munroe, by the end of the sixteenth century a notional separation had developed between a gardener who was a male and who was paid on the basis of his specialized work and women who gardened on an amateur basis and she points to the increasing marginalisation of middle class women from active engagement in the garden. Shteir outlines a similar distinction in botany in which the botanist is personified as 'male and masculine and the botanophile [as] usually female and feminine'.

[173] Louisa Johnson, author of *Every Lady Her Own Flower Gardener* (1840) considered gardening suitable for women who were spinsters, because it was a distraction from life's disappointments.

[174] Bending, S. (2013) ibid..

[175] Like other gardening women of the period Bending notes that Elizabeth Montagu described herself as a 'mere farmeress"

they grew and that they were influential as collectors and in some cases propagators, but they stand as isolated individuals, many of them forgotten in conventional gardening history narratives.[176]

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the growing 'professionalisation' of science, traced by Lightman had resulted in a redefinition of the field hostile to women, creating obstacles for their involvement. Dewis, Page and Smith[177] among others highlight what they describe as the 'humble' tone adopted by Jane Loudon in the preface or introduction to many of her works, where she cites her indebtedness to her husband for the knowledge she possesses.[178] It is arguable that the self-deprecatory tone acts as a defence against a predominantly male dominated world of both horticulture and journalism. Like Shteir and Lightman, Ehrenreich and English argue that the development of a scientific approach served to negate 'women's autonomous sources of knowledge'[179] and acted to exclude women from forms of knowledge and scientific institutions. In claiming to be informed about those subjects and to disseminate this knowledge, a woman needed to declare her amateur status.

Horticulture also experienced a process of professionalisation with the introduction of formal apprenticeships and the emphasis on a theoretical education[180] and the distinction between an amateur and professional had implications for the participation of women. While serving an apprenticeship or a formal process of learning was not an opportunity for women until the end of the nineteenth century, this was not an option for middle-class women. The formal process of education and training required to become a professional not only excluded women, but contradicted conventional views of middle-

[176] More recently, Deborah Reid in her PhD thesis, *Unsung Heroines of Horticulture. Scottish Gardening Women, 1800 to 1930,* University of Edinburgh, 2015, examines the implications of professionalisation on Scottish women gardeners.
[177] Dewis, S. (2016) and Page, J.W. and Smith, E.L. (2011) ibid.
[178] Although it was through her attendance at Lindley's classes on botany that she acquired much of her knowledge.
[179] Ehrenreich, D and English, D. (1978) *For Her Own Good:150 Years of the Expert's Advice to Women*, New York: Anchor/Doubleday. P.4.
[180] John Claudius Loudon himself was particularly keen that young men should seek apprenticeships and an education in horticulture if they were to become more than just jobbing gardeners.

class femininity, described by Shteir as 'tidy, domestic, chaste, modest, delicate, and maternal',[181] while Mary Wollstonecraft a century earlier had called 'patience, docility, good humour and flexibility'[182] as the 'negative virtues' associated with women.

Jane Loudon is keen to point out that she herself is an amateur and not professionally trained, self-proclaimedly confessing that she had no knowledge of horticulture or botany until she met her husband. As an 'amateur' she emphasises more than once that she is also writing for the amateur: ' … books intended for professional gardeners are seldom suitable for the wants of amateurs' (Introduction vi, *Instructions in Gardening for Ladies)* and in the Preface to *The Ladies Companion to the Flower Garden*, 'It is a common complaint among amateur florists, that the directions given for the culture of plants … are scattered ..'. Other women writers such as Alicia Amherst prefaced the first history of gardening with a declaration of her own inadequacy and indebtedness to Mr. Percy Newberry. Marion Cran,[183] writing in the 1920s, reassured readers of her book, *The Garden of Experience,* that her previous publication was entitled *The Garden of Ignorance* and introduced this in a similar self-effacing manner: 'So ignorant I was! … No one could start with less knowledge than I!' she wrote in the first chapter. Much later even Gertrude Jekyll described herself as a 'practical amateur'. Louisa Johnson, one of Jane Loudon's closest contemporaries, refers to her 'little work' intermittently throughout, with a typically meek opening sentence to the Preface which begins, 'I have been induced to compile this little work …'.[184] These techniques of self-effacement were common accommodating tactics employed by many women writers at the time. Neverthless, later in life she argued with her publisher John Murray, who had proposed that her husband's name should be on the title page of a gardening book she had

[181] Shteir, A. Women and Plants – A Fruitful Topic, *Atlantis*. *Critical Studies in Gender, Culture and Social Justice*, Vol.6, No. 2 (1981), York University. P.117.
[182] Poovey, M. (1984) *The Proper Lady and the Women Writer. Ideology as Style in the works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley and Jane Austen*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London. P. xi.
[183] Marion Cran (1875-1942) was to become the first female gardening broadcaster.
[184] Johnson, L. (1842) *Every Lady Her Own Gardener,* www.archive.org/details/everyladyherown00johnson, p v

written in order to benefit from his reputation, which seems to indicate that she was keen to distinguish her own work from his.

Poovey examines the careers of the novelists Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley and Jane Austen in her study, and argues that each of these writers struggled 'to create a professional identity [which] was in large measure defined by the social and psychological force of this idea of proper --- or innate – femininity'.[185] Jane Loudon's emphasis on her amateur status serves a dual purpose. Not only does it avoid being intimidating and exclusionary to her readers, it also protects her position as a 'proper lady'. Commenting on the opprobrium heaped on educated women in some circles, Digby asks, 'Is it therefore surprising that many women maintained a preference for more cautious approaches in the borderland between private and public spheres?'.[186] Writing for a general public and writing to earn an income were not generally perceived to be appropriate behaviours for a proper lady.[187] In advocating the practice of gardening for ladies, Jane Loudon was dangerously close to transgressing several boundaries at the same time. Addressing her publications to 'the lady gardener' was one way in which she could safely navigate those boundaries, while professing her amateur status and indebtedness to her husband for her knowledge cushioned her from gendered prejudice. It is likely that Jane Loudon experienced some opposition to her journalistic activity throughout her life and it may be this which prompted the spiteful remarks made by George Glenny. According to Floud[188], John Loudon had earned a small fortune earlier in his life (an estimated £10.4 million in today's money suggests Floud) and was one of the most highly respected and successful authors of his time, but with a combative reputation to match. In 1834, in the *Gardener's Magazine,* John Loudon had accused George Glenny of reproducing plates that had previously been published in the *Lady's Magazine* in Glenny's own

[185] Poovey, M. (1984) p.x.
[186] Digby, A. (1992) *Victorian Values and Women in Public and Private*, Proceedings of the British Academy 78, pp195-215. The British Academy. P.214.
[187] Encapsulated in the words of Lady Mary Wortley Montague a century earlier: writing was considered 'demeaning if done for publication and disgraceful if for profit'.
[188] Floud, R. (2019) *An Economic History of the English Garden*, Penguin

Horticultural Journal and Florists' Register. Glenny had a reputation for an aggressive and rather testy style of writing but, in replying to Loudon,[189] he instead criticised Jane Loudon who was perhaps a weaker target:

> his old woman is a mischievous beldam, and that the plates in question never appeared anywhere till they were published in the Horticultural Journal. We hate old women at the best of times, but a lying old woman is abominable, and the sooner Loudon shakes the hag off the better.[190]

The ferocity of the attack reflected a prevailing male view that women who wrote about scientific subjects and occupied the space of the professional (male) journalist lacked femininity, an indication that at the age of 27, Jane Loudon was no stranger to cultural uncertainties about the role of women in society.

Several of Jane Loudon's horticultural publications begin with a dedication to her husband and Page and Smith write that '([Jane] felt the need to introduce her major work on *Gardening for Ladies* with the kind of apologetic justification so often employed by writers of the period…dedicating the book to her husband'.[191] *The Ladies' Flower-Garden of Ornamental Annuals,* Jane Loudon's first horticultural publication aimed at women, is not, however, dedicated to her husband as one might expect for her first horticultural work, but to Countess Radnor and reads: 'The Right Honourable, The Countess Radnor, alike distinguished for her love of flowers and taste for the fine arts. This work is dedicated by her obedient servant.' *Instructions in Gardening for Ladies* published one year later in 1840 is dedicated to her husband, while the dedication of *The Ladies Companion to the Flower Garden (1841)* is to Mrs. Lawrence:

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[189] John Claudius Loudon himself was not above his share of criticism. James Rennie (1787-1867) in the *Magazine of Botany and Gardening, British and Foreign* accused him of "filthy and vulgar language" and "utter ignorance and presumption". Ray, D. (1977) Victorian Gardening Magazines, *Garden History,* 5.2, pp 47-67.

[190] Desmond, R. (1977) Victorian Gardening Magazines. *Gardening History: The Journal of the Garden History Society* 5.3 (1977): pp47-66. P.64.

[191] Page, J. and Smith, E. L. (2011) *Women, Literature, and the Domesticated Landscape*, Cambridge University Press, p.164. Lightman also argues that there is a 'façade of deference' on the part of women science writers of the period. Lightman, *Victorian Popularisers*, p. 155.

> To Mrs. Lawrence of Ealing Park, Middlesex, as a warm patron of Floriculture, and excellent botanist and, above all, as one of the first lady-gardeners of the present day. This work is dedicated by her sincere friend.[192]

Both Jane Loudon and her husband had a keen eye for the market and, rather than the 'apologetic justification' put forward by Page and Smith, it is just as likely that the dedications[193] of her works are a matter of strategic self-positioning. The patronage of such eminent gardeners would have offered considerable support for sales.

Others, such as Dewis and Easley[194] claim that references to male writers or experts were often made in order to validate the author's own work and, although these references to male 'experts' including her husband, are also visible in the work of Jane Loudon, these are to a far wider range of people. Throughout her work she periodically refers to 'an excellent gardener' or 'an experienced gardener, eminent alike for his practical and scientific knowledge' (*The Ladies' Flower-Garden of Ornamental Annuals*,1840)[195] which are most likely to be references to John Loudon and the same 'excellent practical gardener' is referred to on page 36 of the same volume. Discussing Bartonia on page 64 she refers to Dr. Lindley ' "it is only beneath the bright sunshine," Dr. Lindley observes, "that its splendid flowers unfold"'. However, these inclusions are no different to mentions of nurserymen, for example. Mr. Charlwood, Mr. Lee and Mr. Hopgood[196] who are most often referred to, but she also directs the reader to Mr. Pamplin 'of the Lavender Hill nursery' on page 123 of *The Ladies' Flower-Garden of Ornamental Annuals* (1840) and on page 125 she advises that the seed of Lotus Jacobeus 'may be procured from Mr. Carter, High Holborn or at Lee's Nursery, Hammersmith'. Similarly, 'Excellent plans for [glass

[192] Mrs. Lawrence (1803-1855) was regarded as having almost unrivalled collections of plants and was a popular exhibitor at the Chiswick Flower Shows. Her 'breakfast parties' were renowned for attracting the elite of aristocratic and fashionable society.

[193] These dedications are also altogether different from those of Louisa Johnson, for example. The dedication to *Every Lady Her Own Gardener* reads: 'that Spinsters …should take up Gardening as a distraction from the unavoidable Disappointments and trials in Life'.

[194] Easley, A. (2019) *First-Person Anonymous*, Routledge. Dewis, S. (2016).

[195] Loudon, J.W. (1840) *The Ladies' Flower-Garden of Ornamental Annuals* (London: William Smith, 1840). Lightning Source, Ltd, Milton Keynes reproduction. Electronic. P.8.

[196] Mr. Hopgood receives several recommendations as a reliable supplier.

cases] will be found in the Gardener's Magazine for 1839 and 1840', her husband's own publication. She advises that the best chrysanthemums to be found in London are at Chandler's nursery, Vauxhall.[197] Jane Loudon's work is replete with references to the gardens of others, both wealthy and less wealthy alike, male and female, other gardeners, nurserymen, botanists, professors as well as her husband. Her pages are almost a 'who's who' of the plant world of the period and would have offered serious promotional possibilities for many, including John Loudon himself.[198] I suggest that Jane Loudon's work demonstrates a greater degree of agency and independence than some analyses attribute to her.

2.5 Audiences and markets

Writers such as Bilston, Floud and Dewis [199] have described the conditions which created the huge expansion in the practice of gardening as a popular activity and gardening advice texts in the nineteenth century: the repeal of the glass tax and technological advances in iron and glass production and the invention of the first lawn mower; the exotic plants introduced to England from other parts of the world; and changes to the production of print and the repeal of taxes on print technologies. Alongside this was the rise of a middle class, housed in suburban villas with smaller gardens.[200] The development of Pulhamite and the introduction of artificial stone by Austin and Coades meant that some of the ornament typical of larger gardens could now be introduced to those of the smaller middle-class home.

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[197] Loudon, J.W. (1840)*The Ladies' Flower-Garden of Ornamental Annuals* , London: William Smith. Lightning Source, Ltd, Milton Keynes reproduction

[198] There are a number of references to John Loudon's published work, including the expensive and ruinous *Arboretum et Fruticetum Britannicum.* It may be argued that Jane Loudon was seeking to promote his work through her own readership. The author of Royal Botanic Stories, Botanic Gardens Edinburgh similarly suggests that 'she frequently promoted her husband's publications within the introductions to her own books, even after his death'.

[199] Bilston, S. (2019) *The Promise of the Suburbs. A Victorian History in Literature and Culture*, Yale University Press; Dewis, S. (2016) *The Loudons and the Gardening Press: A Victorian Cultural Industry*, Routledge. Electronic; Floud, R. (2019) *An Economic History of the English Garden*, Penguin.

[200] See for example Bilston, S. (2019) *The Promise of the Suburbs. A Victorian History in Literature and Culture*, Yale University Press and Davidoff, L. and Hall, C. (1987) *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class*, Chicago University Press.

Both Jane Loudon and her husband catered to this emerging market and the new introductions found their way into the pages of both their magazines. In her introduction to *The Ladies Companion to the Flower Garden*, Jane Loudon recognised these gardeners of more limited means in her address to those, 'possessors of small gardens' and her dialogues with readers of the *Ladies' Magazine of Gardening* demonstrate an awareness of the range of her readership.[201]

As its title indicates, the focus of Dewis' book, *The Loudons and the Gardening Press: A Victorian Cultural Industry* is the gardening press in the Victorian period and the contribution of the Loudons to this, but chapter six is devoted to the career of Jane Loudon herself. As Dewis points out in her introduction, Jane Loudon's career as a journalist remains only partially documented. Here, Dewis examines the contribution made by her to the Book Manufactory and to the work of her husband with his gardening publications. In focussing on *Ladies Companion*, the periodical which most closely resembled the contents of a women's magazine, Dewis shows how Jane Loudon's editing engaged women as consumers and producers in a scientific and intellectual discourse which included references to politics, economics and contemporary affairs. Dewis makes an important contribution to the discussion of the work of Jane Loudon, drawing on archival material from a range of sources and presenting details on the ways in which the Loudons' publications were positioned in the market.

Jane Loudon was not alone in serving the needs of this developing market of women readers with an interest in plants. Lightman and Shteir[202] have examined the development of women's scientific and botanical writing, while Bilston, Moody, Fraser, Green and Johnston, and Page and Smith all detail the rise of the advice text and the periodical press.[203] Poovey points out that for women writers in the

[201] One of John Loudon's books was *The Suburban Garden, and Villa Companion*, published in 1838. This guide to suburban living was intended for the emerging middle classes.
[202] Lightman, B. and Shteir, A. eds (2006) *Figuring it out. Science, Gender and Visual Cultre*, Dartmouth College Press, University Press of New England.
[203] Bilston, S. (2019); Page, J. and Smith, E. L. (2011); Moody, N. (2009) Gardening in Print: Profession, Instruction and Reform, in *Nineteenth Century Gender Studies,* Issue 5.2 (Summer 2009). Available at:

eighteenth century, struggling to negotiate their position, ' … women writers often simply embraced the social role that women as a group had generally internalized. For the most part, women writers were scrupulous about fulfilling the office of educator …'.[204] The epistolary mode of address, where letters and conversations were often situated in domestic settings, offering advice to a younger woman, continued to be common to many women writers of the throughout the nineteenth century, and this forms the basis of *The Lady's Country Companion* and some of Jane Loudon's publications for children. Written as letters as though from an older woman, perhaps an aunt or older friend, to a younger woman beginning on a new venture (a home or garden, for example), these texts offer advice and recommendations. *How to Live a Country Life Rationally,*[205] in particular, includes recipes, tips for appropriate decoration, furnishings, planting, storage, approaches to managing staff and so on – a range of themes typical of many.[206] Lightman suggests that this 'maternal tradition … had given agency to women in the early nineteenth century to write for … women and children',[207] allowing them to write about a range of subjects without acquiring censure. However, Jane Loudon's horticultural instructions for the amateur or lady

gardener differ in that they do not take this form of address and may be a result of the range of publics she was seeking to appeal to. The familiarity of the epistolary mode is replaced by one which places emphasis on learning and science.

https://uhra.herts.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/2299/22790/14129102%20SAUNDERS%20Megan%20Final%20Version%20of%20MA%20by%20Research%20Submission.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y;
Fraser, H. Green, S. and Johnstone, J. (2003) *Gender and the Victorian Periodical*, Cambridge University Press

[204] Poovey, M. (1984) p.38.

[205] The full title of the publication is *The Lady's Country Companion; Or, How to Enjoy a Country Life Rationally*, published in 1845, London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans.

[206] Including the popular Mrs. Beeton. Shteir suggests that even here, however, Webb Loudon was opening up the discourse around education for women, advocating that men and women should read the same books and challenging the idea of separate spheres of education.

[207] Lightman, B. (2007) *Victorian Popularizers of Science,* Dartmouth College Press. P.96.

A raft of legislation aimed at improving women's legal status was enacted from the mid 1850s onwards[208] and, although many key changes began in the 1860s, the first organised attempts to extend the franchise to women had begun in the 1830s, Jane Loudon will undoubtedly have been aware of the debate surrounding these issues. In another of her publications, *Ladies Companion at Home and Abroad* the more well-off readers of the magazine are asked to provide support for working women who were in need of help. In the manifesto of the magazine Jane Loudon outlines an agenda: 'One important feature of this work will be to Advocate the Causes of those Females who are Compelled to Labour, either mentally or bodily'.[209] Jane Loudon herself was only too conscious of the difficulties facing working women.

Jane Loudon's publications were aimed at a diverse market, one which included both the lady owner of a smaller 'villa' garden and someone with a substantially larger amount of land and her writing demonstrates an awareness of the range of readers, even of those with less to spend.[210] Jane Loudon constructs the lady gardener as a middle or upper-class woman who has a garden on her property. The description of the rockwork carried out on Mrs. Lawrence's property is an example of a larger estate while in the Preface to *The Ladies' Flower-Garden of Ornamental Annuals* her address includes 'the proprietor of a small town-garden, who can only grow annuals or bulbs'. The publication of several of Jane Loudon's works in serial format and her tone and mode of address, the material used and made reference to and the popularity of her work suggests a diversity of overlapping publics, the needs of which she was keen to cater for.[211]

[208] Matrimonial Causes Acts (1857, 1878); Married Women's Property Acts (1870,1882)

[209] Loudon, J.W. (1849) *The Ladies Companion at Home and Abroad*, London, Bradbury and Evans, p89.

[210] As she notes in *The Ladies' Flower-Garden of Ornamental Annuals*, one of the reasons given for growing annuals is the speed at which they mature, thus giving a display without having to wait a year, and the gardener gets more value for less expenditure, plants 'may be reared to perfection in three months from a seed which will cost the fiftieth part of a penny'.

[211] Dewis argues that the heterogeneity of the images contained in the John Loudon's *Gardener's Magazine* is also evidence of this.

Between 1838 and 1850 Jane Loudon wrote, produced or edited a number of horticultural publications. *The Ladies' Flower-Garden* series, a part-work sold serially over 18 months, was begun in 1838. This was followed by *The Ladies' Flower-Garden of Ornamental Annuals*, (1840); *The Ladies' Flower-Garden of Ornamental Bulbous Plants*, (1841); *Ladies' Magazine of Gardening* (1841–42); *The Ladies' Flower Garden of Ornamental Perennials* (1842–44), two volumes bound into one, 1847; *The Ladies' Flower-Garden of Ornamental Greenhouse Plants* (1847–48).[212] When 'complete', the bound volume of each series could be sold to the more wealthy female reader. In their market reach and quantity of publication Jane Loudon's work had a significant readership and in her presentation of the garden as a space for women and horticulture as a suitable subject for study, she would have been well-placed to contribute to contemporary debates about femininity and the woman question.

Like the women's magazines discussed by Beetham and Shevelow, Jane Loudon's horticultural work may be read for the ways in which developing ideas of femininity were shaped through the garden and represented in print to a growing female readership. Jane Loudon herself seems well aware of the range of her work. The Preface of *Ladies Flower Garden of Ornamental Annuals*, for example, notes that the 'the very extensive sale of the present volume' is an indication of its usefulness and a little later she points to the *Ladies Flower Garden* series being a 'more comprehensive illustration ... than any other work which has yet been published'. The Preface to *Plain Instructions in Gardening* also gives an indication of the success of her writing: 'As the rapid sale of the previous editions of this work affords the surest proof that it has met the wants of those for whose use it was designed'.[213]

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[212] The bound volume of each series was sold for two guineas on average and served as a reference book for wealthier women readers. Dewis observes that,
'On a small scale they practiced what had been initiated by Scottish publishers: the dissemination of material in multiple forms in order to reach the widest possible number of readers and to reap commercial advantage', (Dewis, 2016:211) and that the Book Manufactory was in fact at the forefront of a trend which was to become well established by the end of the nineteenth century.

[213] By the time that *Botany for Ladies* was published in 1842, the author appears as 'Mrs. Loudon, Author of "Instructions in Gardening for Ladies", "Year-Book of Natural History" &c. &c' indicating that her reputation was well established.

2.6 A suitable subject for women and children

Whether it was botany, or illustration or the embroidery of flowers, the floral world was viewed as a suitable occupation for women in which they might become accomplished. Page and Smith describe how drawing or sketching came to be seen as a suitable skill for the middle- class girl or woman. Dominant cultural stereotypes of the relationship of women to flowers were reflected in the perceived suitability of flower painting as an accomplishment and this association of women with flowers reached its apotheosis in Victorian England. However, the conflicting attitudes to the way in which women were to engage with plants are evident in the examples drawn together by Page and Smith. In 1843 the journal the *Gardener and Practical Florist* addressed Jane Loudon directly in its first issue. The author advises ladies to restrict their attention to 'regulating the petals' of carnations, staking and watering: 'We do not imagine that females are to wheel barrows about, nor to dig the ground as directed by Mrs. Loudon'.[214] An interest in botany and plants on a small scale was regarded as appropriate occupation for the middle class woman, yet Jane Loudon encouraged women to take on the larger work of horticulture and cultivation. In the same year an anonymous contributor to Jane Loudon's *Ladies Magazine of Gardening* writes that lady gardeners 'are, I think you will find, a very numerous class'. It is clear from the women that Jane Loudon refers to, Mrs. Lawrence among others, that many middle and upper-class women were comfortable with work in the garden and the correspondence revealed in the pages of the *Ladies' Magazine of Gardening* is evidence that many women of various backgrounds were active gardeners. Rather than being constrained within their domestic setting, these gardening women demonstrated varying levels of agency. The ideology of 'separate spheres' was not reflected in the lives of many women in the mid nineteenth century.

[214] Quoted in Page and Smith, page 191.

By the middle of the nineteenth century plant collecting (in order to press them) and drawing had become common activities among women across all classes. Botany, in particular, was seen to be an improving subject of study: Jane Loudon herself published two books on the subject. Conventional ideas of femininity manifested themselves in recommendations for what it was appropriate for women to study or draw: foliage and flowers rather than the landscape, the small and the modest rather than the wide and expansive. James Secord [215] traces the increasing popularity of scrapbook albums from the eighteenth through to the nineteenth century as a way for women to display an interest in scientific subjects without appearing overly passionate or knowledgeable. These were often outstanding collections and not simply trivia and today find themselves in museum collections. Like embroidery and collections of curiosities, they reflected a world in miniature, seen as suitable occupations for women and girls. Undoubtedly the question of scale was what recommended botany as a suitable occupation for women and children rather than horticulture. The cultivation of a garden suggested a greater degree of activity and of a magnitude deemed inappropriate for a 'proper lady'. Schor[216] explores the historical associations of 'detail' or 'particularity' with femininity; for Schor scale is gendered. Referring to a broad sweep of art, literature, philosophy and psychoanalysis she asks the question, 'Is the detail feminine?' In an analysis which begins with Classicism and continues through Realism to the time at which she was writing, she argues that Western cultures associate the small and the finely wrought with the feminine. This association of detail with the feminine - a recurring motif in the representation of women in the garden – emphasises the absence of women from the gardened landscape, placing the female figure within the confines of the domestic garden. The feminine activities of pressing flowers, drawing and the embroidery of flowers achieved huge popularity and Waters, for example, writes extensively on the ways in which 'the language of flowers, permeated the literature and poetry of the period'.[217] Page and Smith's discussion of botanic texts similarly suggests that these reflected the suitability of the

[215] Secord, J. Scrapbook Science in Lightman, B. and Shteir, A. eds. (2006) *Figuring It Out*, Dartmouth College Press, University Press of New England.
[216] Schor, N. (2007) *Reading in Detail. Aesthetics and the Feminine,* Routledge.
[217] Waters, M. (1988) *The Garden in Victorian Literature,* Scolar Press. P. 223.

'miniature' as an activity for women.[218] Although Jane Loudon did not entirely eschew these activities for women, in challenging the orthodoxy of appropriate knowledge and activity for women through her horticultural work, she opens up a space between the house and the garden which she uses to represent a femininity which subverts conventional depictions. In her anecdotes, mention of other gardeners and nurserymen as well as the encouragement to study, Jane Loudon's view is expansive, extending far beyond the confines of the garden space itself and notions of enclosure. She writes at length about Lady Broughton's rockwork at the Hoole, featured in the first volume of *The Ladies' Magazine of Gardening* (Fig. 2.2). The description extends over several pages, including the building of the foundations and the acquisition of appropriate types of rock, to the design and views and surrounding planting. The rockwork was modelled on Swiss glaciers, with a valley in between and apparently took eight years to complete, suggesting a female vision which extended far beyond the miniature.

Fig. 2.2
Lady Broughton's rockwork at the Hoole,
from *The Ladies Magazine of Gardening* Vol I.
Available at: https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org
(Acc. 6 December 2021)

[218] Joshua Reynolds, in his *Seven Discourses on Art*, claimed that detail was not only allied to the feminine but 'disfigures the object and puts it within the reach of the masses'. Project Gutenberg 2005.

Most of Jane Loudon's horticultural publications are lavishly illustrated[219] reflecting the popularity of flower imagery and it is often overlooked that she was a talented and innovative illustrator herself. She comments in the Introduction to her work that 'my descriptions will be illustrated by an able artist, lithographed and coloured from nature…'. And in *Instructions in Gardening for Ladies* she notes that 'The engravings have been made here from drawings of specimens previously prepared, and I can therefore vouch for their accuracy', which gives an indication of her involvement in the preparation of the images, although her authorship remains implicit: Jane Loudon is not herself shown as the illustrator, only the printers, Day and Haghe, Lithographers to the Queen.

In these plates, plants are grouped according to the natural system[220] (Fig. 2.3), instead of the conventional habit of depicting them singly. McCouat suggests that Jane Loudon's typical style grouped the 'flowers to form bouquets, making her designs popular to copy as well as being more suitable for use for decoupage on trays, lampshades and tables'.[221] He notes that, 'She also made full use of the new technique of chromolithography which made print production much faster and enabled her to increase her output'. This may have been an important factor in contributing to the rate at which she and her husband published, particularly when under financial pressure.

[219] *The Ladies' Flower-Garden of Ornamental Annuals* for example, contains 310 colour plates.
[220] Pen and ink illustrations enabled the artist to bring together different elements of a plant's life cycle and highlight individual details of anatomical relationships. Many of Jane Loudon's illustrations reflect Linnaeus' classification system of family, division, genus and species groupings.
[221] McCouat, P. Forgotten Women Artists #2: Jane Loudon: artist, futurist, horticulturalist and author, *Journal of Art in Society*, www.artinsociety.com. First published November 2017. Accessed 20. 10. 2021

Fig. 2.3
Jane Loudon (1841) *Nymphaea*
Available at: https://www.artinsociety.com/forgotten-women-artists-2-jane-loudon.html
(Acc. 04/11/2021)

Dewis claims that, 'In general, the proportion of image to text is greater in the *Ladies' Magazine Of Gardening* than in the *Gardener's Magazine* [aimed at a male readership] confirming the representation of female consumers as similar to children and more responsive to visual imagery than written text.'.[222] However, drawing on the work of W.T. Mitchell,[223] Lightman and Shteir[224] examine the role of imagery historically, suggesting instead that pictures have been used far more widely to engage the audience in the subject. Gates also notes that, '… illustrations served multiple functions. They are meant to delight as well as instruct and consequently have numerous aesthetic as well as pedagogical purposes'.[225] This interpretation fits more neatly with the more progressive social agenda embraced by the Loudons, where the dissemination of the science of horticulture is viewed as a means to enlarge the role of

[222] Dewis, S. (2016) p 207.
[223] Mitchell, W.J.T., (2002) *Landscape and Power*, The University of Chicago Press.
[224] Lightman, B. and Shteir, A. eds (2006) *Figuring it out. Science, Gender and Visual Cultre*, Dartmouth College Press, University Press of New England.
[225] Gates, B. (2006) Those Who Drew and Those Who Wrote: Women and Victorian Popular Science Illustration in Lightman, B. and Shteir, A. eds *Figuring It Out*, Dartmouth College Press, Hanover, New Hampshire. P.192.

women and serve the improvement of the working class. Rather than view Jane Loudon's illustrations in the gendered terms put forward by Dewis, then, this study adopts the more nuanced approach suggested by Lightman and Shteir.

2.7 Horticultural writing

Each of Jane Loudon's horticultural publications demonstrates a broad range of interests including science, botany, history, geography and frequent reference to additional reading where appropriate and interest dictates, encouraging the reader to expand their horizons beyond the pages of the journal. Although she often uses an anecdote to illustrate a point, the information that she offers the reader is encyclopaedic, including the botanical classification of the plant; a brief history, which may include when the seed or plant was introduced to England and by whom; the origins of the plant; varieties; both Latin and common names; methods of cultivation and propagation and recommendations for suppliers of seeds or plants[226]. The composition of the completed volumes has a common arrangement. In the introduction to *The Ladies' Flower-Garden of Ornamental Annuals,* Jane Loudon writes that,

> I shall first give the Botanic and English names; next the synonyms, if any, and then the names of the modern English books in which the flower has been figured. To this I shall subjoin a short botanical character, which will be followed by a popular description, with the geography, history, properties and uses, culture, and in short, everything worth knowing of this plant.[227]

What Jane Loudon does not include in this Introduction is that she also gives the reader information on where plants or seeds may be found, which nurserymen supply them, recommendations for gardens to visit and where particular garden items or structures may be viewed. There are occasions when the detail of a particular plant extends to several pages, for example Papaver (poppy) covers seven pages of dense text, with 'Papaver Somniferum, *Lin*. The Opium Bearing, or Large White Garden Poppy' constituting five of these. The detail of its origins, where it is grown and for what purpose and by whom

[226] See for example *The Ladies Flower-Garden of Ornamental Annuals*.
[227] Loudon, J.W. (1840) p.iii. This paragraph begins with, 'In the arrangement of the present work, I intend to follow … the plan adopted by my husband, in his lately published *Arboretum et Fruticetum Britannicum.'* Please see additionally footnote 50.

is extraordinary. Jane Loudon examines the commercial properties of the poppy, from India to England, via Turkey, France and the Netherlands. In Turkey, she writes,

> It is frequently mixed with rich syrup or candied fruit, and made into lozenges, which are stamped with the words Mash Allah, literally, "the work of God". In this state it is taken by women and even children; but never without producing a most injurious effect upon the constitution. The Turkish men generally take it raw; and there are certain coffee-houses in Constantinople set apart for those who have habituated themselves to the use of this drug. In these places, stupid, heavy-looking men may be seen sitting on a bench, waiting for the effects it will produce.[228]

For those readers who would like to know more she refers her audience to Madden's *Travels in Turkey*. Violas and Nicotiana are accorded similar detail, although not so many pages. Similarly, Clarkia receive an extended historical anecdote:

> This pretty annual was first discovered by Captains Lewis and Clarke, in 1803, though it was not introduced into England till1826. In 1803, when Jefferson was president of the United States, he proposed to Congress to send some competent persons to ascend the Missouri, cross the Stony Mountains and explore the western part of North America. The persons chosen were Lewis, who had been two years private secretary to Jefferson and William Clarke both of whom received captains' commissions before their departure. The expedition occupied three years and was very successful; and during the time of it the Clarkia was discovered by Captain Clarke, and dried specimens were sent to Pursh, the naturalist, who described it in his Flora of North America.[229]

Although featuring extensively throughout her work, none of Jane Loudon's anecdotes or anecdotal evidence makes reference to the medicinal qualities of plants nor to their symbolism and, as Shteir[230] notes, this approach was significantly different to that of her contemporaries, marking out her work as distinctively separate from other gardening publications aimed at women in its concentration on science as a basis for horticulture. This positioning is important to an understanding of both the way in which Jane Loudon addressed her audience and to the subject matter she chose to present. Shteir locates the work of Jane Loudon at the boundary of science and tradition showing, for example, how she shunned the traditional 'female' subjects of herbal lore in favour of scientific answers and suggests that

[228] Loudon, J.W. (1840) p.18.
[229] Loudon, J.W. (1840) p.56.
[230] Shteir, A. (1996) *Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science,* John Hopkins University Press.

her work was a 'diffusion' of scientific knowledge, enabling women readers to move from more generalised fields of knowledge to the particular. In her chapters on the kitchen garden, both in *Instructions in Gardening for Ladies* and *The Amateur Gardener's Calendar* the focus is on growing fruit and vegetables. Herbs are to be cultivated for culinary purposes.

Shteir[231] situates Webb Loudon in the wider context of scientific writing in the early nineteenth century and Jane Loudon's view that horticulture should be viewed as a science is clear from her own comments. In the Introduction to *Plain Instructions in Gardening*[232] she refers to 'gardening as a progressive science' and in the Preface she writes that 'the most interesting feature of the new [scientific] doctrines is that they explain scientifically why practices succeed' and this marks a significant departure from the practice of other women writers[233] of the period. Louisa Johnson's work, *Every Lady Her Own Gardener,* published in 1842, is often used as a comparator to the work of Jane Loudon. Like Jane Loudon's horticultural publications this is an advice text, familiar in tone, with chapter headings on bulbs and perennials, shrubs and evergreens, greenhouses and jobs for each month. However, there are significant differences. There are no claims to be scientific and Johnson does not include information on plant origins or any of the anecdotal evidence typical of Jane Loudon. By contrast with Jane Loudon who is a clear advocate of female gardening activity, in her chapter, 'General Remarks', Johnson comments that, 'Many females are unequal to the fatigue of bending down to flowers, and particularly object to the stooping posture' and she goes on to suggest some solutions.[234]

[231] Shteir, A. (1996).
[232] This volume is a reprint of Jane Loudon's earlier *Instructions in Gardening for Ladies.* Rewritten and published in 1851, the dedication reads 'The memory of J.C. Loudon Esq. (to whom the author of the following pages owes all the knowledge of the subject she possesses). This work is dedicated by his affectionate widow. JWL".
[233] Maria Jacson, Elizabeth Kent and Louisa Johnson, for example.
[234] Johnson, L. (1842) *Every Lady Her Own Gardener,* www.archive.org/details/everyladyherown00johnson, p. 15

In the main, Jane Loudon's tone is well-informed, expert and forthright. Whatever the subject, she articulates her own opinions with confidence. For example, she writes that Fumaria '… are all weedy looking plants, and scarcely worth cultivating'.[235] Similarly, on Corydalis 'its small, oddly shaped flowers, which are huddled together at the extremity of the shoots, render it far from ornamental'.[236] On page 221 of *The Ladies Companion to the Flower Garden* she writes that '[Plectranthus] are not worth the trouble it takes to cultivate them'. Similarly, of Solanum on page 275, ' ..their foliage is too coarse to be ornamental'. A lengthy description on the planting up of a border ends with,

> There are very few borders in England that have been planted with this degree of care because the prevailing fault of British gardeners is a desire for quantity indicating power, rather than of quality indicating taste. The amateur who has a small garden and will take the trouble to select the finest flowers, [may] produce an effect which he will not see in the garden of any professed garden that we know of.[237]

In the September issue of *The Lady's Magazine of Gardening* she is again blunt when commenting on one of the gardens visited during her 'Editor's Tour'

> I was disappointed with New Posso, the next place we visited, probably because I heard a great deal about it before I saw it. It is finely situated … I do not think, however, that art has lent any aid to nature; on the contrary, the plantations and laying out of the grounds did not appear to me to harmonise with the general character of the place.[238]

Similarly, the October issue includes this comment on Dryburgh Abbey, 'The ruins are fine but choked up by a small garden, with a paltry little greenhouse, such as would suit a third-rate suburban villa[239] near London'.[240] Jane Loudon's prose indicates a writer who is confident, instructive and assured of her recommendations and mention of Lindley or Paxton is not simply deferential, but part of her overall education of the reader. Rather than view her work in the gendered terms suggested by Dewis [241] and others, I would argue that Jane Loudon's approach is more of a collaborative one and that her

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[235] Loudon, J.W. (1840) p.42.
[236] Loudon, J.W. (1840) p.41.
[237] Loudon, J.W. (1840) p.3.
[238] *The Lady's Magazine of Gardening, p286,* https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/page/56305005
[239] This is not quite the slur that it appears to be. In his work, JCL had produced a hierarchy of gardens which ranged from first to third rate, but was the classification was based around objective criteria such as size of land occupied.
[240] *The Lady's Magazine of Gardening,* p 290, https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/page/56305005
[241] Dewis, S. (2016)

professional relationship with her husband be seen as a partnership. The delivery of opinion and instruction and the frequent example of her own experience suggest a woman confident in both her knowledge and audience reception. Reference to her own experience and recommendations indicates that Jane Loudon writes as a trusted expert in her field. In *The Ladies' Flower-Garden of Ornamental Annuals* descriptions for cultivation of plants are based on her (and doubtless her husband's own experience). On Bartonia for example,

> We sowed some seeds, procured from Mr. Charlwood, in a warm rich border, in the open air, in May 1838, taking care to give the young plants plenty of water, and in the latter end of June they were splendidly in flower, producing a succession of blossoms till the plants were killed by the frost. This frost was a very slight one; and though it killed the Bartonia, and a Calandrina near it, did not hurt even the Geraniums (Pelargoniums), which were trained against a wall. [242]

For the reader, this short passage would have given information on length of flowering time and hardiness, as well as the possibility of growing the plants successfully from seed and also the protection afforded by a wall.

By the time that *Instructions in Gardening for Ladies* was published in 1840 the author appears as 'Mrs. Loudon', but also as 'author of The Ladies Flower Garden' indicating that her credentials were well established. In the Introduction, she writes, ' [it] is as perfect as I can make it', another indication of her increasing confidence. In the range of material included, advice and recommendations offered this publication is very much produced on her own terms and of all her written work, it is this which includes the greatest horticultural detail. Like much of her work, the dedication is to her husband 'To whom the author of the following pages owes all the knowledge of the subject she possesses … this work is dedicated by his affectionate wife'. Jane Loudon writes that she understands how books intended for professionals often do not satisfy the needs of amateurs and she again points to the difference between the amateur and the professional, emphasising that she has come to learning late: 'Having been a full-

[242] Loudon, J.W. (1840) p.64.

grown pupil myself'.[243] This reference to a late education is repeated in the preface to *A Companion to the Ladies Flower Garden, '*Having felt this inconvenience myself, it occurred to me that a Dictionary of the English and botanic names of the most popular flowers, with directions for their culture, would be useful'. Throughout her publications, Jane Loudon uses herself and her experience as example and the implication here is that it is possible for women to educate themselves. Her work throughout characteristically avoids being intimidating and exclusionary. The correspondence pages of the *Ladies Magazine of Gardening* offer readers an opportunity to contribute and enjoy an exchange of views without patronising. In the first issue she deals with a correspondent who asks whether planting a primrose upside down will change its colour, a common gardening myth at the time. Jane Loudon responds with information which typifies her approach:

> The old saying respecting planting the primrose with its head downwards, is, I believe, one of those popular errors which have been handed down from generation to generation, without any one taking the trouble to examine into their accuracy. Roses which have been forced, and some other plants in pots, are, however, frequently kept by gardeners with their heads downwards … to throw them into a state of perfect rest. [244]

In Chapter 1 of *Instructions in Gardening for Ladies* titled 'Stirring the soil,' she includes both reasons for digging soil as well as how to dig, followed by a discussion of appropriate tools. These instructions occupy seven pages of text. The reasons for digging the soil, although scientific in essence, are presented very much in lay terms. For example, in pointing out reasons for breaking down the soil she writes, '… by admitting the rain to percolate slowly through the soil, enables it to absorb and retain sufficient moisture to afford a proper and equable supply of food to the spongioles [of the root of the plant]'.[245] Later, in the Chapter II, 'Manuring the Soil', she discusses the results of over-manuring: '… it

[243] Loudon, J.W.L. (1840) *Instructions in Gardening for Ladies,* London: John Murray

[244] Loudon, J.W. ed. (1841-1842) *Ladies' Magazine of Gardening* London: William Smith. P.29.

[245] Loudon, J.W.L. (1840) p.5.

is only the humic acid, and carbonic acid gas, contained in manure, which make that substance nourishing to plants'.[246]

When explaining types of digging methods, Jane Loudon is at pains to point out that 'It must be confessed that digging appears, at first sight, a very laborious employment and one peculiarly unfitted to small and delicately formed hands and feet'. She suggests that '… a lady, with a small light spade may, by taking time, succeed in doing all the digging that can be required in a small garden…'.[247] Gauntlets, clogs and gaiters are recommended as suitable items of clothing and footwear, with no suggestion of elegance, although notions of conventional femininity do appear. Jane Loudon's instructions for gardening challenge predominant ideas of women's incapacity for manual labour. When discussing more laborious forms of digging, for example, she suggests the use of a wheelbarrow. The combined effort of digging and moving a wheelbarrow would, she writes, most likely result in 'the lady' becoming flushed and perspiring.

Working within the domestic sphere of activity, although Jane Loudon does not create an overt challenge to the existing patriarchal structures of the period, she is nevertheless subtly altering the terms in which women are represented. The exhortation to activity and engagement with the garden is evident in Chapter X when she writes about rustic baskets. She states that '… indeed a lady with two pairs of small pincers would find no great difficulty in twisting the wire herself. The great point is to exercise your own skill and ingenuity; for we all feel so much more interested in what we do ourselves than what is done for us, that no lady is likely to become fond of gardening, who does not do a great deal with her own hands'.[248] More than her other work, *Instructions in Gardening for Ladies* is an instruction manual, seeking to advise a female gardener on what and how to grow and the scientific

[246] Loudon, J.W.L. (1840) p.26.
[247] Loudon, J.W.L. (1840) p.8.
[248] Loudon, J.W.L. (1840) p.344.

principles on which horticulture is based. In doing so, it extends the knowledge of the reader and encourages a degree of activity and engagement not generally associated with 'the proper lady'.

Jane Loudon founded and edited *The Lady's Magazine of Gardening* in 1842.[249] Like her other publications it was grounded in science, with articles on how light works in relation to colour and a detailed discussion over several issues of the science underpinning glass cases. Although the tone of address she uses has been adopted from the chatty periodicals of Maria Jacson and Louisa Johnson, her introduction of scientific, geographic and historic detail as well as matters of plant cultivation, extend the interest well beyond the developing general periodical press aimed at women readers. Each issue contained a wide range of named and pseudonymous contributors, both male and female. Some contributors were gardeners to others for example, the curator of Chelsea Botanic Garden, the curator of the Botanic Garden in Berlin and Mr. Lawrence, gardener to Reverend Theodore Williams, while others were simply named as 'a lover of birds'. It also included named women contributors and articles from the editor herself. Contrary to Poovey's argument that many women chose to publish anonymously, either because they felt their comments were too radical a challenge to prevailing definitions of femininity or because of the opprobrium which women journalists were likely to receive, this is not reflected in the pages of the Magazine. Dewis even suggests 'that with the naming of Mrs. Glover, Miss Smith and Mrs Atherstone, Webb Loudon successfully (albeit briefly) promoted a small-scale network of garden writers'.[250] The range and diversity of contributors may be read as an indication of the engagement of an increasing number of women prepared to step into the public sphere and further evidence that Jane Loudon's aim of bringing women into the fields of horticulture and science was working. The April issue of the Magazine includes this fulsome letter from a reader:

[249] The publication was shortlived, lasting only a year. The December issue ends with 'With this number the Ladies Magazine of Gardening will conclude, as from the number of other works I have in hand, I am no longer able to give it the attention it requires. As a volume, however, I trust it will still prove useful to the class for which it was originally designed; that is, to all those who, though fond of flowers, are neither regular gardeners nor professed florists'.

[250] Dewis, S. (2016) p.205.

> Madam, — I am much pleased to see a new periodical launched into the world of letters under your special superintendence. I know no one who could bring forth such a thing with a better chance of success. You are near to a very copious fountain of horticultural novelties; and you have access to more of the richest collections of both books and plants than any one else in the amusement and instruction of your readers. Many of your correspondents have bound themselves, either by accident or choice, to some particular section, order, or genus of the science; others to particular species, which absorb all their perceptions. Some are medical botanists, others chemical, or physiological, or dietetic, or entirely floral. All these are devotees, and so completely compressed within their own narrow boundaries, that they can neither by desire nor exertion see any thing beyond. They are bound hand and foot by their darling studies, and never deviate into variety. Now you, madam, are free from all such trammels. You have not been trained up in any narrow exclusive path of the science …

Further evidence of the regard in which Jane Loudon was held by many and a recognition of the extent of her knowledge.

Visits to gardens featured regularly in the magazine pages of both Jane Loudon and her husband. The family's extended tour of the gardens of Scotland and the north of England in 1842 featured in the pages of both *The Gardener's Magazine* edited by John Loudon and in *The Ladies' Magazine of Gardening*. Given the title 'The Editor's Tour'[251] by Jane Loudon, her description includes visits to gardens, stately homes, modes of travel, conversations as well as notes on plants and cultivation. In addition to providing information on gardens and cultivation, Jane Loudon's commentary on the tour is personal and makes reference to their daughter, Agnes, and also to her husband's health. Some have observed that there is a difference in the writing of husband and wife 'at the level of the sentence',[252] with John Loudon using the plural 'we' while Jane Loudon uses the first person singular and describes her personal response to the flowers. The emphasis on 'female feeling' has been developed by others in their analysis of literary work, where they see a difference between male and female responses, which Poovey[253], for example, in her discussion of Mary Wollstonecraft

[251] 'The Editor's Tour' covered several pages of each issue of *The Ladies Magazine of Gardening* from September to December.
[252] Dewis, S. (2016) p. 208.
[253] Poovey, M. (1984).

elaborates. Nineteenth century strictures suggested that whereas men relied on discourse and rationalisation in the way in which they viewed the world, women were incapable of generalising and were thereby trapped within their own personal experience and this inflection was apparent in their written work. However, the feminine voice is not common to all of Jane Loudon's horticultural publications, most of *Instructions for Gardening* is written in the passive and where 'I' is present in her other work, it is usually a note on growing conditions observed.[254] In writing and working within the print media and pushing at the boundaries of appropriate knowledge for women, Jane Loudon was attempting to manage a precarious boundary and, as Shteir puts it, she was working 'pragmatically within the dominant mid-century norms of gender and class'.[255]

2.8 Concluding comments

From the late eighteenth century through the first half of the nineteenth century the domesticated landscape became increasingly central to the lives of middle-class women. Analyses of fiction, instructive texts and periodicals highlight the ways in which gardening was presented, not only to entertain but to educate and inform audiences. The identification of the garden with home, permeated contemporary gardening publications, placing it firmly within the female sphere of activity. However, the garden also provided an opportunity for women to, materially and symbolically, negotiate between the domestic and the public. Stephen Daniel's comment that gardens 'sit at the intersection of the personal and political, local and national, epic and everyday'[256] positions the garden as a more complex space than the dichotomous 'inside/private' and 'outside/public' suggest. The theme which emerges from this discourse describes a tension between restraint and self-determination. This discourse of containment

[254] See page 178 of LCFGA on Mathiola.
[255] Shteir, A. (1996), p26. Howe (1961) notes that Jane Loudon did not attend appointments with her publishers on her own, for example, and was usually accompanied by one of John Loudon's sisters or her daughter.
[256] Daniels, S. Love and Death across an English Garden: Constable's Paintings of His Family's Flower and Kitchen Gardens, in The Huntingdon Library Quarterly, 1992 Vol. 55 issue 3 pages 433-458, p. 433.

and control continued well into the nineteenth century and formed a background to the work carried out by the Loudons themselves and the idea of the garden as an appropriate space for women.

Heath Schenker argues that 'Close reading of Jane Loudon's writing about gardens reveals an empowering subtext for middle-class women',[257] presenting the garden as a means to self-development and empowerment and there is no doubt that this was to some extent recognized in Jane Loudon's work, as a contributor to the first issue of *The Lady's Magazine of Gardening* writes, 'A lady at the present time is not ashamed to know the botanic name of a plant, or the difference between the metal Mercury and the planet of that name'.[258] Whereas Schenker views Jane Loudon's work as potentially empowering, Shteir, among others, appears to contradict this in her comment that 'Jane Loudon did not place herself dramatically at variance with mainstream cultural practices'.[259] It is clear from her comments in *The Ladies' Country Companion* that Jane Loudon was not challenging the idea of separate spheres for men and women. In Letter XVII she writes that 'It is, indeed, better that married people should have separate occupations during a part of the day; but they should never have separate interests'.[260] Similarly, in the manifesto of *Ladies Companion at Home and Abroad*, the periodical she edited between December 1849 and June 1850 she writes that, 'The necessity of mental cultivation will be strongly enforced; not to make women usurp the place of men, but to render them rational and intelligent beings'.[261]

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[257] Schenker, H. Women, Gardens and the English Middle Class in the Early Nineteenth Century in Conan. M. ed. (2002) *Bourgeois and Aristocratic Cultural Encounters in Garden Art 1550 – 1850* Dumbarton Oaks, Washington D.C. P. 349.

[258] 'Letters on the Chemistry of Every Day Life', *The Ladies Companion at Home and Abroad,* 1 (29 Dec. 1849), 12

[259] Shteir, A. (1996) p224. Lisa Hopkins detects an 'innate conservativism in JWL's story telling. "Jane C. Loudon's The Mummy!: Mary Shelley Meets George Orwell, and They Go in a Balloon to Egypt." *Cardiff Corvey: Reading the Romantic Text*, Issue 10 (June 2003) at 5-16 http://sites.cardiff.ac.uk/romtextv2/files/2013/02/cc10_n01.pdf, accessed October 2021.

[260] Loudon, J.W. (1845) p.364.

[261] Loudon, J.W. (29 Dec 1849), p. 87.

However, attempts to place the work of Jane Loudon in a feminist historical narrative are problematic and categories such as 'feminist' or 'non-feminist' are reductive. She clearly did not pursue a feminist agenda of the kind demonstrated by Mary Wollstonecraft, for example, but the lives of many prominent Victorian women expose a wide range of contradictory perspectives on the woman question, both privately and publicly. It is important to acknowledge the constraints within which Jane Loudon was working, not only socially but personally. Like other women of the time she was obliged to support not only her own family but that of her husband through an occupation which was fraught with challenges.[262] Through her horticultural work she extended writing for women, to include science, history, geography and current affairs as well as the conventionally accepted 'feminine' subject, botany. Jane Loudon's own experience and horticultural writing indicate that ideas of separate spheres of activity can simultaneously embrace and subvert conventional orthodoxies. In her horticultural writing the garden acts as a liminal space, at once embracing the larger world and the domestic. My research positions Jane Loudon's work in the context of the social and intellectual history of the period and shows how her horticultural writing both articulated and challenged conventional discourses. Jane Loudon's representation of the woman in the garden not only challenges definitions of what it is to be 'a proper lady', but positions her in opposition to a Ruskinesque 'woman as object'.

Jane Loudon's use of science, her geographical references, her encouragement of activity beyond the currently acceptable for women recommends a far wider engagement than the purely domestic or morally improving. To use a point made by Thompson in her discussion of Harriet Martineau, it was necessary to 'validate the patriarchal ideology of separate spheres, while at the same time challenging its underlying assumptions about women's "natural" roles and abilities'.[263] On losing the editorship of

[262] Maria Jacson (1755 – 1829), for example, came to the attention of Erasmus Darwin through her botanical writing. She and her sister lived together and she worked additionally to support their brother who had fallen into debt.

[263] Thompson, N.D. (2000) *Victorian Women Writers and the Woman Question*, Cambridge University Press. P.93.

The Ladies' Companion, Jane Loudon wrote a final piece which addressed all women, 'Real and vital happiness depends only on *ourselves*. If once the mind can grasp this truth, and with firmness and courage resolve to draw happiness from the sources whence alone it springs, no storms from without will permanently shake us'. Howe appears to draw the same conclusion as Thompson, ' … this first class article testif[ied] to her unusual liberal views … [and] it declared her faith in the emancipation of her sex …'.[264]

Radical as some of Jane Loudon's suggestions for women gardeners may have seemed at the time, she was not seeking to position women as the equals of men. Nevertheless, in the first half of the nineteenth century the prevailing view was that women did not belong in the garden because they lacked the physical strength and intellect to manage the space.[265] Jane Loudon not only encouraged women to be in the garden, to plan and to plant, but also to be physically active and even to use a spade and wheelbarrow and in doing so she structured the garden as a transformative space for women and offered new ways of constructing femininity.

[264] Howe, B. (1961) p. 122.

[265] By the late nineteenth century, there was clearly no lack of women garden writers. For example, Gertrude Jekyll was born in 1843 and Ellen Willmott in 1858, two of England's most well known female horticulturalists

Chapter Three. Elizabeth and her German Garden: appearing languid.

Fig.3.1
Sketch of Elizabeth von Arnim
Available at: https://en.wikisource.org/w/index.php?title=Author:Elizabeth_von_Arnim&oldid=10801451
(Acc. 20 June 2023).

3.1 Introduction

Elizabeth and her German Garden was the first book to be written by Elizabeth von Arnim and frequently considered as semi-autobiographical. First published in 1898, it was followed by what some regard as a sequel, *The Solitary Summer,* in 1899. Although the latter was less successful as a novel, it also uses the garden as a space where its narrator explores some of the issues of the day.

This chapter positions von Arnim's work in the context of the social and intellectual history of the period and shows how her representation of the woman in the garden both articulated and challenged existing discourses. Using *Elizabeth and her German Garden* and its sequel, *The Solitary Summer*, I will consider how the garden described in von Arnim's work, intersected with historical debates around gender, examining the view that the garden in the latter half of the nineteenth and early twentieth century England presented a space in which ideas of femininity could be explored, offering middle class

women an opportunity to create alternative femininities which engaged with broadly developing ideas in society. In this chapter I recognise the garden as a space where oppositions of private versus public and their relationship to representations of femininity may be explored. No critical analysis to date examines the space of the garden in *Elizabeth and her German Garden* and *The Solitary Summer* from the perspective of horticultural practice and the representation of femininity. My reading of von Arnim's 'garden romances' examines how Elizabeth's horticultural activities identify the garden as a space where questions may be raised regarding some of the contradictions inherent in prevailing ideologies and constructions of femininity.

3.2 Background: a life

First published in 1898, by May 1899 *Elizabeth and her German Garden* was available in its twenty-first edition and had earned von Arnim more than £10,000 in its first year, demonstrating its popularity. Von Arnim's work has, however, only more recently received scholarly attention,[266] having been for many years dismissed as women's fiction and middlebrow, despite the evident regard in which she was held as a writer during her lifetime.[267] Variously called a diary, a journal and a novel,[268] the book marks the start of von Arnim's writing career, establishing themes to which she would return in future work. Alison Hennegan notes the issues which preoccupied von Arnim throughout her life and which continued to be evident in all her novels:

> male tyranny over women, practised domestically, sanctioned socially and culturally; the links between domestic and national tyranny … the morally warping effects of poverty, subordination

[266] As Römhild points out, von Arnim's work has only attracted scholarly interest towards the end of the twentieth century.

[267] Von Arnim's novels were read by Virginia Woolf, held in high regard by Katherine Mansfield with E.M. Forster, Hugh Walpole, and Bertrand Russell all testifying to her literary credentials.

[268] Hapgood describes the novel as 'a medley of forms: romance fiction, fictionalised autobiography and memoir. Terence de Vere's description of the book as 'an imaginative biography' is probably the best assessment' (Hapgood, 1995:101). Capuccio, R. Strange Monsters: The Struggle for Women's Validity as Artists in the Writings of Elizabeth von Arnim and Katherine Mansfield in Kimber, G. Maddison, I. and Martin T, eds *Katherine Mansfield and Elizabeth von Arnim* (2021) Edinburgh University Press, describes it as a 'fictional diary'.

> and spiritual enslavement, particularly for women; the existence of women as a class; and what one might call the 'economy of female beauty.[269]

Hennegan traces these themes throughout von Arnim's work, creating links with other writers of the period who shared her concerns, but her focus is on von Arnim's later fiction rather than *Elizabeth and her German Garden*. She concludes with the comment that von Arnim was preoccupied with a '…wide range of concerns in which economics, class, gender, sexuality, nationalism and power are inextricably inter-related'.[270] The popularity of *Elizabeth and her German Garden* reflects the extent to which the themes explored by von Arnim were reflected in the general discourse of the period and are important to a consideration of representations of femininity.

In *Femininity and Authorship in the Novels of Elizabeth von Arnim,* Römhild comments on 'the strong autobiographical features' of *Elizabeth and her German Garden* to the extent that,

> … it is clear that von Arnim identified with her protagonist, so much so that her biographers regularly mistake one for the other and employ quotations from the books in order to illustrate von Arnim's state of mind.[271]

She goes on to argue that von Arnim 'uses "Elizabeth" as a projection screen for her readers that turns out to be so successful that writer and character become indistinguishable not only to the public but also to family and friends'.[272] The first biography, *Elizabeth of the German Garden* was published in 1958 by von Arnim's daughter.[273] The most recent, published in 2013, is by Walker[274] and draws attention to areas of von Arnim's life which have received less consideration, her music, for example. However, the biography that is most useful is Usborne's *Elizabeth*,[275] which includes unpublished

[269] Hennegan, A. In a Class of Her Own: Elizabeth von Arnim in Joannou, M. ed. (1999) *Women Writers of the 1930s. Gender, Politics and History,* Edinburgh University Press, p.102.
[270] Hennegan, A. (1999) p.112.
[271] Römhild, J. (2014) *Femininity and Authorship in the Novels of Elizabeth von Arnim*, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, p. 69.
[272] Römhild, J. (2014), p.7.
[273] Von Arnim's daughter Liebet published the biography under a pseudonym, Leslie de Charms.
[274] Walker, J. (2013) *Elizabeth of the German Garden – A Literary Journey: A Biography of Elizabeth von Arnim*, Book Guild Publishing.
[275] Usborne, K. (1986) *'Elizabeth'. The Author of Elizabeth and her German Garden*, The Bodley Head.

material from the family archive and von Arnim's papers at the Huntingdon Library. Like Simo's[276] work on Loudon, Usborne's extensively detailed research is also referred to by other writers. Relying heavily on von Arnim's journals and contemporary material, the biography firmly situates the writer and her work, presenting a portrait of a woman who often struggled with the conventions of married life and society. Usborne begins her biography by using 'Elizabeth's' name correctly. Born Mary Annette Beauchamp, Usborne informs the reader that she will refer to von Arnim as 'Elizabeth' only after her biography reaches the point where she describes the publication of *Elizabeth and her German Garden* which is on page 69, such is the autobiographical element of von Arnim's work. Maddison argues that 'von Arnim wrestled with the intersection between autobiography and literary invention, offering reworked personal impressions whilst preserving her anonymity'.[277]

Mary Annette Beauchamp, often called 'May' by her family, was born in Sydney, Australia, in 1866. In 1870 the family left Sydney to live in London, where she developed a talent for music. Using von Arnim's diaries and evidence of her rejection of what her family perceived to be eligible suitors, Usborne claims that there was some concern among von Arnim's family, before she married, that she was 'turning into a feminist'.[278] However, aged twenty-two and travelling in Rome with her parents, she met newly widowed Graf Henning von Arnim-Schlagenthin, a Prussian aristocrat, who was considerably older than her and not regarded by her family as a particularly suitable match despite his title. In spite of her parents' misgivings, they married in London in February 1891 and the couple moved to Berlin where three girls were born. In 1896 the family visited Count von Arnim's estate in the countryside, where Mary Annette fell in love with the garden and it became the inspiration for her first book, *Elizabeth and her German Garden*, which she published anonymously observing the expectations that

[276] Simo, M.L. (1988).

[277] Maddison, I. (2013) *Elizabeth von Arnim. Beyond the German Garden*, Ashgate Publishing, p. 49.

[278] Usborne uses this statement from von Arnim's diaries to support this assertion, 'I would preach independence. Only that, always that. … they would be warning against props … shake them off, the props tradition and authority offer you, and go alone, crawl, stumble, stagger, but go alone' (Usborne, 1986:32).

accompanied her title of Countess. The following novels,[279] at her publisher's suggestion, were published 'By the Author of *Elizabeth and her German Garden',* a not uncommon practice which had been used by other authors such as Jane Austen and Walter Scott. Römhild suggests that rather than inhibit the popularity of her work, this simply added to it and she traces how von Arnim 'capitalized' on the success of earlier her work 'by merging her literary alter ego with her author-function until they became indistinguishable'. [280]

A representation of von Arnim's marriage is described in *Elizabeth and her German Garden* and is supported by biographical detail in other texts. In 1908, when Elizabeth moved to London with her children, the separation from her husband was regarded as an estrangement which was partly a result of the Count's affairs. By the beginning of the twentieth century, she had become very friendly with Maude Stanley,[281] a prominent feminist, and whose house she stayed in when she visited London and who was, according to Usborne, instrumental in separating von Arnim's income from that of her husband, whose debts she had already discharged on a number of occasions. It was Maude Stanley who also persuaded von Arnim to educate her daughters as boys. By this time von Arnim had a well-established circle of friends, many of whom she had met in Maude Stanley's home including George Bernard Shaw, George Santayana, John Middleton Murry, Max Beerbohm and her cousin, Katherine Mansfield, with whom she became close friends. Maddison describes these as a 'loose group of influential artists and thinkers in the early twentieth century'.[282] Additionally, E.M. Forster and Hugh Walpole (who were themselves to become eminent writers) had been tutors to von Arnim's children at Nassenheide. In 1910, when her husband became increasingly ill, von Arnim and her daughters

[279] Von Arnim wrote seven further novels at Nassenheide.
[280] Römhild, J. (2014), p.4.
[281] The Hon. Maude Alethea Stanley, 1833 –1915, was a prominent pioneer in welfare work and was, in particular, a women's welfare activist. When she died, both Queen Mary and Queen Alexandra sent representatives to the service – a demonstration of the esteem in which she was held.
[282] Maddison, I. (2013), p.9.

returned to Germany to be with him. Towards the end of 1910 von Arnim had formed a relationship with H.G. Wells (another of her associates who was to become a celebrated author and in whose novels she featured), despite her marital status and his (Wells was married to Amy Catherine Robbins, known as Jane by von Arnim and others), and this continued until 1913.

Following the death of her husband, von Arnim spent some time in London as well as at the chalet she had built in Switzerland, hosting many prominent intellectuals of the time. She had already met Earl Russell (Francis Russell, the older brother of Bertrand Russell) at Maude Stanley's and invited him to join her at her chalet for Christmas 1913, when her relationship with Wells came to an end, although Russell too was already married. Following Russell's divorce he and von Arnim eventually married in 1916. Even though the relationship has been described as a 'disaster'[283] the couple remained married, while continuing to have other relationships. Like much of her other work, her 1921 novel *Vera*, is semi-autobiographical and draws on her marriage to Earl Russell. Regarded by some as her most critically acclaimed work, when first published it was, however, less well received. In an attempt to comfort her on the novel's lukewarm reception, Middleton Murry told her that '… when critics are faced with a Wuthering Heights written by Jane Austen, they don't know what to say',[284] which is another indication of the esteem with which her work was received by many. A number of academics[285] point to the concerns that von Arnim expressed regarding what she perceived as German aggression, while at the same time fearing the reception that her daughters would receive in England.[286] Although von Arnim had left Germany during the war her youngest daughter, Felicitas, remained behind in the care of

[283] Maddison, I. Romhild, J. Walker, J. (2017) Reading Elizabeth von Arnim Today: An Overview. *Women: A Cultural Review*, 28:1-2, 1-6, DOI: 10.1080/09574042.2017.1320070. www.tandfonline.com
[284] Quoted in Brown, E. (2016) *Comedy and the Feminine Middlebrow Novel: Elizabeth von Arnim and Elizabeth Taylor*, Routledge, p 75.
[285] Walker, J. (2017) Elizabeth and Her Mountain Garden, *Women: A Cultural Review,* 28:1-2. 40-55, https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rwrc20. Romhild, J. After Life – Expressions of Mourning in Elizabeth von Arnim and Katherine Mansfield in Kimber, G. Maddison, I. and Martin, T. eds (2021) *Katherine Mansfield and Elizabeth von Arnim,* Edinburgh University Press.
[286] Usborne notes that the girls were instructed to mitigate their German accents while in England.

friends and died there from pneumonia at the age of 16. Her older daughter, Beatrix, had married a German officer in 1919 and von Arnim also felt that this was very much a loss to her.

Russell and von Arnim finally separated in 1919 and von Arnim divided her time between Europe, England and the U.S.A. where two of her daughters now lived. In 1920 she returned to her home in Switzerland and began a relationship with a young man, Alexander Stuart Frere (who later became chairman of the publisher Heinemann) and who had initially been invited to the Chalet Soleil to catalogue von Arnim's library. The affair lasted several years, until Frere married a woman closer to his own age, but the two remained friends: Elizabeth was made godmother to Frere and his wife's first child and the baby was christened Elizabeth. Von Arnim spent her later years leading a fairly nomadic existence, travelling between friends and various hotels and rented rooms. Divisions in the family, between herself and her children (some of these political and others connected to finances) and between the children themselves had never quite healed and, according to her biographers[287] she felt alone much of the time. Von Arnim died from complications arising from influenza in 1941 and, at her request, her ashes were returned to England and combined with those of her brother Sydney with whom she had always had the closest of relationships.

3.3 Two Garden Narratives: *Elizabeth and her German Garden* and *The Solitary Summer*

Much of the discussion about von Arnim's work centres around her positioning within the literary canon, her feminist credentials, her prose style and the autobiographical nature of some of her work. Von Arnim is variously situated by scholars as a cultural feminist, as part of the aesthetic movement and as a New Woman writer.[288] The difficulty of categorising von Arnim's work is neatly summarised by

[287] Elizabeth was closest to her daughter Liebet, who was appointed executor of her estate and given the power to destroy material as she saw fit. The first biography of Elizabeth, *Elizabeth of the German Garden*, by Leslie de Charms (Liebet's pseudonym), was published in 1958.

[288] See Shepherd J. Marketing middlebrow feminism: Elizabeth von Arnim, the new woman and the fin-de-siecle book market, *Philological Quarterly* 84:1 (2005): 105-31, who views von Arnim as a cultural feminist; Moine, F. Elizabeth von Arnim's Garden Memoirs: Cultivating Feminism*, Cahiers Victoriens et Edourdiens*, 77

Maddison, Römhild and Walker '… critical responses struggle to identify an appropriate and fixed classification for von Arnim's hybrid writing, which moves deftly between … the diary form, the country-house novel, the (uneasy) romance and occasionally, the Gothic genre'.[289] More recent classification of her work as 'middlebrow' has, suggests Römhild, only now enabled academics to critically engage with her work. O'Connell's description of *Elizabeth and her German Garden* as an 'an ambivalent book',[290] perhaps sums up the prevailing discourse. This ambivalence extends to 'Elizabeth' herself. Römhild suggests that 'Elizabeth' like von Arnim's other characters is a self-representation: in her 'cultivation' of this persona, von Arnim becomes the progenitor of a garden writing genre by constructing herself as 'Elizabeth'.[291] Thus the garden at Nassenheide is taken as the model for the garden represented in *Elizabeth and her German Garden*, where von Arnim and her family lived for some years until the Count died, although this picture is confused by E. M. Forster's claim that while at Nassenheide he did not really see a garden there at all. Walker goes further in suggesting that the character of Elizabeth is a 'playful and charming masquerade'[292] and this idea of performance is further emphasised by Maddison who writes that her '… approach underscores the *performance* of gender by using frippery, satirizing the ideals of "femininity" and so giving license to subversion in a style acceptable for a wide readership'.[293] The separation of 'Elizabeth' the persona from that of May (Mary) Beauchamp (apparently Katherine Mansfield usually referred to her cousin as 'May') is further complicated by the

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Printemps, 2013. http://journals.openedition.org/cve/353.Acc 17/02/2022, who views von Arnim as part of the aesthetic movement; Harris, D. Cultivating Power: The Language of Feminism in Women's Garden Literature, 1870 – 1920, *Landscape Journal,* Fall 1994, Vol. 13. No 2. Pp. 113-123 and Cunningham, A.R. The "New Woman" Fiction of the 1890's, *Victorian Studies*, Dec., 1973, Vol. 17, No. 2 pp 177-186, who categorise von Arnim as a new Woman writer

[289] Maddison, I. Römhild, J. & Walker, J. (2017) Reading Elizabeth von Arnim Today: An Overview, *Women: A Cultural Review,* 28:1-2. 1-6, https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rwrc20. P.4.

[290] O'Connell, R. (2017) *'Love Scenes and Garden Plots: form and femininity in Elizabeth von Arnim's Elizabeth and her German Garden'*. Retrieved on 25/04/2021 at https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Love-Scenes-and-Garden-Plots. P.3.

[291] Römhild points out that there are other aspects of von Arnim's life which found their way into her novels. Using extracts from her diaries, Römhild demonstrates the 'rather porous border between fact and fiction' (Römhild, 2021:14) as sentences from her letters appear in her fiction and she suggests that von Arnim's novel *Christine* was an attempt to work through a grief for a dead daughter which could not be adequately expressed in life.

[292] Walker, J. (2013) *Elizabeth of the German Garden*, London: Book Guild, p.41.

[293] Maddison, I. (2013), p. 2.

authorial signature of 'By the author of *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*'.[294] Although Von Arnim's positioning by literary scholars has only a tangential relevance to my work, it is nevertheless important in locating von Arnim historically, foregrounding the work of a writer who is only receiving recognition more recently and, in doing so, pointing to the way in which her writing presents women and their concerns.

Elizabeth and her German Garden and *The Solitary Summer* are two examples of what have been described as a vogue for garden narratives which spanned the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth.[295] Composed as a diary and made up of a series of reflections and observations on both gardening and domestic life, the 'diary entries' of the first novel extend from May to September. The witty Elizabeth, the diary narrator, is the wife of The Man of Wrath, mother of three small children and mistress of their large country estate. The narrative, juxtaposing the garden and the house, describes marriage to a domineering husband, but also the pleasure which Elizabeth takes in her garden. The opening sentence, 'I love my garden', immediately places the reader within the space of Elizabeth's garden and this is followed by a description of what it means to her and the ways in which it permits her freedoms which she feels she does not possess in other areas of her life. Interspersed throughout are Elizabeth's considerations of the role of women and married life, as well as her plans for the garden, the planting itself and her gardeners. Shortly after the opening sentence, the reader is made aware that Elizabeth 'liv[es] almost entirely in the garden' and is regarded as 'exceedingly eccentric' in her failure to adhere to conventional norms of behaviour. Like a diary, *Elizabeth and her German Garden* is written in both present and past tense where Elizabeth describes her present feelings and the situations which give rise to them – any other point of view is conveyed purely through dialogue. Underpinned by a sly sense of humour and communicated through an intimate chattiness of

[294] The notion of mimicry is developed further by Kerry Maguire, The Cloak of Definition: Fantasies of Feminine Identity, *Literature and Psychology;* 2000; 46, 3. ProQuest.
[295] Hapgood, L. (2005) *Margins of Desire. The Suburbs in Fiction and Culture,* Manchester University Press.

style, Elizabeth's unique perspective gives the book a sense of immediacy and shares with the reader an apparent glimpse of personal life. Beginning 'November 11th', one part of the book falls outside the autobiographical remit. Here, Elizabeth goes back to the place where she was born (which the diary locates in Germany) to visit what she calls her father's garden. In terms of narrative and structure it is at odds with the remainder of the novel and did not appear in the original publication.[296] This chapter contains Elizabeth's reflections on the enduring themes of displacement and loss typical of the female heroine of the romantic English novel.[297] She writes that she regrets not being born a boy 'Oh it was a terrible misfortune not to have been a boy!',[298] but her declaration is less to do with any ideas of inheritance and more to have control over the gardens which her father had so loved, rather than have them taken over by her cousins. Nevertheless, there are echoes here of the sense of dislocation felt by women in spaces which are gendered male and typified by Jane Loudon in her struggle to gain a foothold in horticultural journalism and Helen Graham's labour in re-creating her husband's Assam garden.

The Solitary Summer follows a similar seasonal narrative and includes further thoughts on her garden, but it incorporates more description of her guests and neighbours and the people who live in the area surrounding Elizabeth's house. The title of the book is derived from Elizabeth's stated wish to spend some time alone on the estate through the summer, which she then uses for reading. Like her first novel, it describes Elizabeth's reflections on gardens and gardening, but also longer digressions discussing the writers and philosophers who she is reading. The extent to which von Arnim's fictitious

[296] Tomkinson notes that it was published separately as *A Pious Pilgrimage*, with illustrations by Kate Greenaway in 1901 and only appeared as part of EGG in later editions. Tomkinson, F. (2017) Elizabeth's Pious Pilgrimage; or the Ghost in the Garden, *Women: A Cultural Review,* 28:1-2. 101-114, https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rwrc20.

[297] The sense of dislocation, particularly the displacement of female family members by male heirs, has informed not only fiction: Vita Sackville West had to leave her beloved family home, Knole, in favour of her male relatives.

[298] Von Arnim, E. (1898) p.81. The wish to be born a man is repeated throughout Elizabeth's diaries, often expressed through a frustration of the limitations on independence and freedom of self-expression.

persona overlapped with Elizabeth's is demonstrated by the illustrations which accompanied some editions of *The Solitary Summer*, where the bookshelves contained the material that Elizabeth refers to in her own reading.[299] *The Solitary Summer* presents the countess as a keen reader, on intimate terms with philosophers and literature alike and someone who 'anthropomorphises' her books with both irreverence and respect. (Boswell, for example, is referred to as 'Bozzy'). Römhild points out that the strategy of declaring a 'close personal familiarity' with favourite works served not only to invite the reader into Elizabeth's world, but to encourage and extend readerly habits and challenge conventional orders of discourse. Jane Loudon's work similarly extends this sense of inclusivity to her readers and writers alike.

3.4 Private Troubles and Public Issues

By the end of the nineteenth century the importance of gardening as a suitable pastime for women was well established but, as O'Connell has observed, there had been a move away from gardening advice (such as that typified by Jane Loudon) to the gardening book, often based around a diary or journal format. Bilston[300] describes how 'the garden book' appeared in the 1890s emerging from the earlier gardening advice texts of which Jane Loudon was one of the pioneers. For Hapgood, what she terms 'the garden romance' 'emerged in response to a particular cultural moment',[301] a combination of suburban development, aspiration and a nostalgia for what Mitchell and Oakley[302] defined as 'the rural idyll'. She views this form of the novel as 'Variously composed as diaries, journals and personal reflections … these romances constitute a distinctively female literary form'.[303] Popular culture had

[299] See Römhild, J. '*Betwixt and Between': Reading von Arnim Writing Elizabeth*, La Trobe University, Working Papers on the Web. Electronic source. The University Library of Toulon holds some of von Arnim's private library.
[300] Bilston, S. (2019) *The Promise of the Suburbs*, Yale University Press.
[301] Hapgood, L. (2005) p. 94.
[302] Mitchell, J. and Oakley, A. (1977) *The Rights and Wrongs of Women* Pelican Books.
[303] Hapgood, L. (2005) p. 94. Nevertheless, Hapgood includes in her discussion Alfred Austin's *The Garden That I Love* (1894) which, she argues, was structured around a feminised narrator and which some see as a precursor to von Arnim's work.

been defined as feminine as early as the mid-nineteenth century and the middle-brow fiction which developed from the end of the nineteenth century into the early twentieth century was regarded as the logical outcome of the trend. Literary history notes the dominance of fiction by female authors at the turn of the century and von Arnim's books have until recently been considered within this tradition of 'women's writing', that is, writing by women for women.[304] In 1929 J.B. Priestly[305] referred to von Arnim as a writer of 'feminine fiction', regardless of the fact that she clearly shared many of the same preoccupations as her male contemporaries.

The association of fiction and the feminine is developed by Pykett who argues that women writers and their 'feminine fictional practice were seen as compromising the novel's claim [to be] a serious art form'.[306] At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century many commentators, notably male, were critical of the fiction written by women, viewing it as something which undermined literary standards and demeaned authentic (male) culture. As Walker points out, von Arnim's work has been defined by a series of shifting discourses which have, in the main, relegated her work to the commercially popular and literally vapid. It was left to Virago, the feminist publishing house, to republish many of her works as 'classics' in the 1980s which brought her writing to the attention of academics, even though her work was originally well reviewed alongside other now more celebrated writers of the period such as Jean Rhys and Elizabeth Bowen.[307] More contemporary readings of von Arnim's writing have sought to re-establish her literary credentials: in an assessment of one of von Arnim's later works, *The Pastor's*

[304] See Römhild for example.

[305] J. B. Priestly (1894 – 1984) was himself a well-published novelist and playwright, later going on to broadcast patriotic talks during the second world war. One of his best known plays is *An Inspector Calls*.

[306] Pykett, L. (1995) *Engendering Fictions. The English Novel in the Early Twentieth Century*, Edward Arnold, p.55.
Miller (1994), however, points out that a number of characters as well as some narratives were drawn from Wells' association with von Arnim. Hierarchies of discourse are evident in the accolades awarded to him, but not to von Arnim.

[307] In the second series of *Downton Abbey,* Matthew Crawley's valet gives Anna a copy of *Elizabeth and her German Garden* in the hope that it will prompt conversation between them. According to Miranda Kiek the director, Julian Fellowes, used it because of its 'huge popularity at the turn of the century' *Independent* 8 November 2011.

Wife, Nick Turner,[308] for example, argues that the novel is a 'neglected classic' and makes a claim for its feminist themes. Capuccio[309] suggests other reasons for the neglect of much of von Arnim's work. The diary format used by von Arnim in *Elizabeth and her German Garden* and *The Solitary Summer*, he argues, was more likely to be dismissed as 'not quite literature'. Referring to Victoria Raoul's work on women and diaries, Capuccio begins with what he describes as the myth of the woman's diary as 'private, domestic and psychological' a description of the 'banal elements of a woman's life',[310] a concern with the quotidian which was regarded as a particularly female quality.

In her discussion of the Edwardian novel, Miller notes that by the Edwardian period 'the 'Marriage Problem', was a prominent discourse, but she points out that von Arnim 'does not focus on the 'larger' issues of social or legal reform; rather she looks at what the marriage problem means for women on a private, personal level'[311] and it is very likely this intimate engagement with the personal which made her novels so attractive to her female readers. In 1959, Wright Mills[312] described what he viewed as the distinctive but clear relationship between private troubles and public issues. Using the diary format and by opposing the space of the garden to that of the house, von Arnim exposes the private and domestic to public scrutiny, identifying the private trouble of marriage as a widespread and public issue. Having experienced one disastrous marriage and another which was fairly unsatisfactory, it is perhaps not surprising that in von Arnim's work the conventional narrative trajectory of romance and marriage is subverted.

[308] Turner, N. (2017) Elizabeth von Arnim's *The Pastor's Wife:* A Reassessment, *Women: A Cultural Review,* 28:1-2. 56-71, https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rwrc20.
[309] Capuccio, R. Strange Monsters: The Struggle for Women's Validity as Artists in the Writings of Elizabeth von Arnim and Katherine Mansfield in Kimber, G. Maddison, I. and Martin T, eds (2021) *Katherine Mansfield and Elizabeth von Arnim*, Edinburgh University Press
[310] Capuccio, R. (2021), p.86.
[311] Miller, J.E. (1994) *Rebel Women. Feminism, Modernism and the Edwardian Novel.* Virago Press, p.77.
[312] Mills, C. Wright (1959) *The Sociological Imagination*, New York: Oxford University Press.

By the end of the nineteenth century popular novelists such as Sarah Grand and George Egerton were drawing attention to and questioning accepted ideas of the feminine role,[313] although they often differed in precisely which aspects were to be discarded. What had been called the 'woman question' during the nineteenth century had now been reframed: the 'woman question' had become the 'marriage question'.[314] Many of these writers championed a more open approach to discussions of sexuality and the ways in which female sexuality, in particular, was traditionally described for the Victorian reader. Von Arnim herself scandalised both her friends and neighbours when she declared that her husband, Henning, had only to sneeze in the same room as her and she became pregnant.[315] Miller suggests that articles in journals of the period such as *The Lady* and *The Queen* demonstrated a heightened awareness of the 'the marriage problem' and this assertion may be supported by the popularity of von Arnim's books. Miller's focus is on von Arnim's later work which, she argues, addressed the problem more specifically and her discussion does not include *Elizabeth and her German Garden* as characteristic of these marriage problem novels, simply describing it as a 'chatty and charming autobiographical account of life on her husband's country estate'.[316] It is nevertheless clear that the rejection of 'social and novelistic traditions which placed romantic desire as the dominant desire in a women's life'[317] is already evident in von Arnim's two early novels. 'The marriage problem about which [she] wrote was the conflict between married women's need for independent purpose and achievement in their lives and the social ideal of wifely submission and self-sacrifice'.[318] In *Elizabeth and her German Garden* it is evident that Elizabeth's sense of achievement is not fulfilled solely through her role as wife and mother and that she derives a great deal of satisfaction and joy from her garden. Garden and

[313] As were more prominent writers such as George Eliot and Thomas Hardy.

[314] Sarah Grand, for example, wrote that the 'Woman Question is the Marriage Question'.
The New Aspect of the Woman Question Author(s): Sarah Grand. Source: *The North American Review*, Mar., 1894, Vol. 158, No. 448 (Mar., 1894), pp. 270- 276 Published by: University of Northern Iowa. Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/25103291

[315] See Usborne (1986)

[316] Miller, J.E. (1994), p.76.

[317] Miller, J.E. (1994), p.5.

[318] Miller, J.E. (1994), p.73.

contentment are set against the demands of children and family and the themes outlined by Hennegan[319] which underlie her later work are clearly discernible in her first 'garden romances'. The garden is the space where the prevailing discourse that the only fulfilling goal for a woman was to be married can be undermined.

Von Arnim's observations in *Elizabeth and her German Garden* – although not using the form of the novel, but rather a more autobiographical structure as a platform for her ideas – raise a number of these problematics and use the garden as a space in which to do so. The conventional romance takes marriage as the logical outcome of an often linear narrative, where desire is fulfilled when a couple marry. Von Arnim offers a 'dry unsentimental treatment of the relationship between men and women' [320] and presents a portrait of marriage complete with blemishes. However, the situation of the wife restricted by her marriage is tempered by humour and this may have enabled her work to appeal to a wider audience. The wit to which her friends and contemporaries referred[321] is evident in her sly comments: throughout the book the declarations of The Man of Wrath are set against the observations, often pitched in a humorous way, of the author. At one point, von Arnim compares the usefulness of a man with that of a sofa.[322] The lightness of touch with which these comments are delivered lessens the extent of irreverence.

3.5 PARVA SED APTA

The association of the small with the feminine explored by Schor is reflected in von Arnim's work, where the detail of living 'in a cloud of dust and germs produced by wilful superfluity of furniture'[323] is

[319] Hennegan, A. In a Class of Her Own: Elizabeth von Arnim in Joannou, M. ed. (1999) *Women Writers of the 1930s. Gender, Politics and History*, Edinburgh University Press
[320] Turner, N. (2017), p. 69. Barbara Pym quoted in Turner.
[321] Von Arnim's wit, at its most cutting, could reduce grown men to acute embarrassment at the dinner table according to Usborne.
[322] Von Arnim, E. (1898), p.167.
[323] Von Arnim, E. (1899) p. 16.

juxtaposed with the largesse of sitting '… in the evening, … by the rose beds and listen[ing] to what that lonely and beautiful spirit has to tell me of night, sleep, death and the stars'.[324] Elizabeth's reading of various philosophers in *The Solitary Summer* describe a woman engaging with broad philosophical concerns, the larger issues which 'fill the mind with … loftiness and grandeur' and which were viewed as the domain of men, a clear contradiction of the process identified by Schor in which femininity is indelibly associated with the particular and small, 'all that is strong, vast and sublime is better perceived by the one, all that is delicate, gracious, and fine is better felt by the other'.[325]

On more than one occasion, Elizabeth questions her right to read and interpret these philosophers, 'What prospect is there then … for any woman to become an esteemed 'alert and heroic reader'. She juxtaposes her passion for books with that of, 'an all-consuming passion for, say, hats',[326] clearly differentiating herself from 'feminine' concerns. In *Elizabeth and her German Garden* von Arnim describes the oppressiveness of the quotidian and contrasts this with the liberty offered by the garden where she is allowed to be whatever she wishes, in effect 'a room of one's own'. Von Arnim represents Elizabeth as only able to engage with these 'loftier' concerns when she is in the garden, the space which allows her a degree of freedom and independence. At one point Elizabeth asks whether Thoreau had the same demands of domesticity made on him,

> … I know that inside his covers he is discoursing away like anything on the folly of allowing oneself to be overwhelmed in that terrible rapid and whirlpool called a dinner … Yet he is right, luncheon is a snare of the tempter … So .. I am punished every day by that two-o'clock-in-the-afternoon feeling.[327]

The discourse around detail is reflected in the perceived suitability of certain types of activity for women. Waters identifies three basic functions fulfilled by representations of women in Victorian fictions, which he argues is 'congruent with and serves to accentuate particular aspects of her

[324] Von Arnim, E. (1899) p. 19.
[325] Schor, N. (2007) p.19.
[326] Von Arnim, E. (1899) p. 19.
[327] Von Arnim, E. (1899) p. 17.

femininity'.[328] The fictional female can supervise or delegate, demonstrating her aesthetic sensitivities; she can perform delicate tasks such as tying back roses; or she may play the role of ornament, demonstrating her 'natural' beauty and alignment with nature. As Shteir points out, this discourse is reproduced in and through a dominant ideology which viewed botany as 'aesthetically concordant with feminine beauty',[329] while the larger tasks of horticultural cultivation were regarded as lacking in feminine aspect. Jane Loudon had noted that hen using a wheelbarrow, for example, a lady would most likely become flushed and perspire – qualities which would be regarded as singularly unfeminine.

The association of detail and the feminine and its concomitant dismissal as less important is also reflected in the critical observations that *Elizabeth and her German Garden* and *The Solitary Summer* were not worthy of literary merit, focussing as they do on the minutiae of daily life. Elizabeth's musings on her philosophical readings are frequently undercut by an irony which introduces the 'feminine' concerns of daily life. At the end of a protracted discourse on her philosophical reading she finishes with, 'I'll go and play with the babies, who at this moment are sitting in a row on the buttercups, singing what appear to be selections from popular airs'.[330] Although reading philosophy, she displays a 'feminine' modesty at her accomplishment, ' … who am I that I should talk in this unbecoming manner of Carlyle?'.[331] The diffidence attributed to Elizabeth towards her reading also underpinned von Arnim's attitude towards her publications: Usborne notes that she referred to her writing ability as a 'slender little talent'[332] sometimes referring to her work as 'story writing'. At her behest her gravestone had written on it, 'PARVA SED APTA', small but suitable.[333] The accommodating tactics of self-effacement have much in common with the writing of Jane Loudon.

[328] Waters, M. (1988) p.242.
[329] Shteir, A. (1996) p. 35
[330] Von Arnim, E. (1899) p.23.
[331] Von Arnim, E. (1899) p.21.
[332] Usborne, K. (1986) p.25
[333] Usborne, K. (1986) p.309.

3.6 Indoor and outdoor spaces

Despite the description of *Elizabeth and her German Garden* as a 'garden romance' far less has been written about the ways in which von Arnim used the garden as a vehicle for her narrative, although there are a few notable exceptions. O'Connell,[334] for example, clearly links themes which are key to this thesis: femininity and gardens. However, her analysis focusses on the language employed by von Arnim, rather than on the space of the garden itself. Young,[335] in her thesis, explores the role of the garden in the work of von Arnim, although not in *Elizabeth and her German Garden*. Römhild also points to the critical importance of the garden in the novel, 'It is not Elizabeth writing about a garden; it is Elizabeth writing in a garden, which is presented not as the 'object of the artist's imagination but as an engaging, tempting and interruptive subject'.[336] Although Römhild discusses *The Solitary Summer* and the way that the garden supports mental well-being, she does so from a philosophical perspective, interweaving Aristotle, Wordsworth and Thoreau.

I suggest another reading of *Elizabeth and her German Garden* and *The Solitary Summer* – one in which von Arnim is offering the reader alternative representations of femininity, using the space of the garden and Elizabeth's experience of it to deliver these. The Man of Wrath,[337] for example, clearly has no affinity for the garden, but neither does he view it as a suitable space for a woman. On one occasion, having just returned home, Elizabeth takes him on a tour of the gardens she is creating and

[334] O'Connell, R. (2017).

[335] Young, K.E. (2011) *More than "Wisteria and Sunshine": The Garden as a Space of Female Introspection and Identity in Elizabeth von Arnim's 'The Enchanted April' and 'Vera'.* A thesis submitted to the faculty of Brigham Young University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts. Retrieved on 07/05/2021 at https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent. Young argues that the importance of the garden as sanctuary is evident in von Arnim's later work, when women defend their right to their time in the garden, to retreat to it as a sanctuary where they are 'able to find the strength to insist on being treated as a person rather than a beautiful object' (Young 2011:9).

[336] Romhild, J. (2017) 'So that my soul may have time to grow': Joy and Happiness in Elizabeth von Arnim's The Solitary Summer, *Women: A Cultural Review,* 28:1-2. 86-100, https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rwrc20. P.68.

[337] Von Arnim's husband, Count von Arnim-Schlagenthin, is characterised in her first two novels as 'The Man of Wrath' and represents a range of discourses which are variously nationalistic, militaristic and view women as second-class citizens. He reappears as Count Otto in a later work, *The Caravaners* (1909), and is here additionally presented as a boorish philistine.

in which she clearly delights, 'I took him round the garden along all the new paths that I had had made, and showed him the acacia and lilac glories, and he said that it was the purest selfishness to enjoy myself when neither he nor the offspring were with me … I tried to appease him by offering him the whole of my salad and toast supper … but nothing appeased that Man of Wrath, and he said that he would go straight back to the neglected family'.[338] This passage sets up von Arnim's view of femininity against the more conventional view of The Man of Wrath. The popularity of the book is an indication of the sympathy which many readers must have had with the views expressed in its pages. O'Connell comments that '… the Man of Wrath stands in for a set of discourses that would disallow women not only literal gardens but also the range of goods which gardens represent: solitude, leisure, pleasure, self-determination and creativity'[339] and the represented Elizabeth challenges each of these in turn. Men are characterised in opposition to Elizabeth's garden and her claim to these goods. Although reliant on her gardeners, von Arnim describes them as fickle or incompetent and, in one case, as insane. In all cases, their gardening practises are described as in opposition to hers. Kime Scott identifies the gardens described by both Mansfield and von Arnim as spaces of 'renewal and becoming' set apart from 'androcentric, male-dominated spaces and expectations'.[340] A similar argument is put forward by Page and Smith[341] who claim that the garden was, for women at the end of the nineteenth century, a space where they could begin to exercise a degree of freedom and experimentation.

The idea of the garden as sanctuary and retreat is a prominent theme in garden discourse generally and features large in the historical descriptions of gardening for both men and women.[342] Bending's

[338] Von Arnim, E. (1898), p. 13.
[339] O'Connell, R, (2017) p.7.
[340] Kime Scott, B. Tracing Garden Networks: Katherine Mansfield and Elizabeth von Arnim in Kimber, G. Maddison, I and Martin, T. eds (2021) *Katherine Mansfield and Elizabeth von Arnim*, Edinburgh University Press. P.39.
[341] Page, J.W. and Smith, E.L. (2011)
[342] See Bending, S. (2013); Brown, J. (1999); Dixon Hunt, J. (2000); Vercelloni, M. and Vercelloni, V. (2009); also Francis, M. and Hester, R.T. eds. (1995) *The Meaning of Gardens,* The MIT Press; Ross, S. (1998) *What Gardens Mean*, The University of Chicago Press.

study[343] brings together women and the garden as retreat, examining the part played by the garden in the lives of four prominent women in the eighteenth century and provides an overview of the contexts in which women have been placed when gardens have been discussed. Bending focusses on the meaning of the garden, however, to middle and upper-class women who retired or were forced to retire into the country. O'Connell[344] extends the discussion and argues that the experience of retreat differs dramatically between men and women. She offers an interpretation of *Elizabeth and her German Garden* in relation to Alfred Austin's *The Garden That I Love* which was published in 1894, and which von Arnim had evidently read.[345] She examines the way in which for Austin the garden as a male retreat is a remove from the bustle of public life, whereas for a woman this notion of retreat is more aspirational, a theme which finds some resonance with Elizabeth, who constantly seeks a corner of her garden where she cannot be seen. O'Connell provides a fascinating analysis of Austin's work concluding that his text 'represents not only a realm of withdrawn, inert middle age, but also of the sentimental, patriotic, patriarchal conservativism to which the tropes of enclosure and stasis, so closely associated with gardens, easily lend themselves'.[346] She locates the source of this sense of entitlement in the (male) protagonist's place in society and suggests that, written by a woman, the boundaries would be far less clearly drawn. Although she does not reference the work of Rose, O'Connell's discussion clearly draws on the critique of masculinist geography which underpins her work, where Rose argues that space needs to be considered from a female perspective. In *Elizabeth and her German Garden* and *The Solitary Summer* Elizabeth re-draws the garden as a significantly different space. She too views the garden as sanctuary, an opportunity for retreat and restoration, albeit not in the conventional sense. Although the garden does allow Elizabeth a form of respite from the demands of the traditional feminine role, it is only in the garden where she can extend the boundaries of her life through her reading and engagement with philosophy. Elizabeth does not recline in a lounge chair

[343] Bending, S. ibid
[344] O'Connell, R, (2017)
[345] This is referred to in De Charm's biography of her mother.
[346] O'Connell, R. (2017) p.5.

reading a novel; she actively chafes at her position and rails against the restrictions placed on her by her married situation and her gender.

The notion of the freedom offered by the garden in opposition to the constraints of the house are reflected in von Arnim's description of the woman at the window, 'I sat by the window in my room till late, looking out at the moonlight in the quiet garden, with a feeling as though I were stuffed with sawdust…'[347] and 'These were my reflections, and many others besides, as I sat weary at the window that cold spring night …' .[348] The importance of the window as a frame for the relationship between 'outside' and 'inside' is also established within the first few pages of *Elizabeth and her German Garden*, 'I love those west windows … and have chosen my bedroom on that side of the house so that even times of hair-brushing may not be entirely lost …'.[349] In her discussion of adaptations of Jane Austen for the screen, Pidduck draws attention to the representational device of the woman sitting at the window, 'The recurring moment of the woman at the window captures a particular quality of feminine stillness, constraint and longing', which signifies 'the importance of the gendered interior and exterior space'.[350] Sliwka[351] also comments on this framing of the woman in the window as an artistic motif and notes that it has persisted for hundreds of years, reflecting feminine ideas of decorum, morality and religious belief. However, von Arnim goes on to note that the 'girl' brushing her mistress's hair 'is grieved at [her] habit of living almost entirely in the garden', so that the conventional image of a woman in her bedroom, attended to by a maid, is undermined by a text which already demonstrates an impatience with daily and domestic rituals, challenging those connotations of restraint and passivity identified by Pidduck and Sliwka.

[347] Von Arnim, E. (1899), p.103.
[348] Von Arnim, E. (1899), p.104.
[349] Von Arnim, E. (1898), p.5.
[350] Pidduck, J. Of Windows and Country Walks: Frames of Space and Movement in 1990s Jane Austen Adaptations, *Screen 394*, Winter 1998, p. 381.
[351] Sliwka, J. (2022) *Reframed. The Woman in the Window*, Dulwich Picture Gallery.

Fig. 3.2
Vedder, S.H. (1906)
'I love those west windows better than any others.'
Available at: https://archive.org/details/elizabethhergerm00elizuoft/page/n9/mode/2up
(Acc.12/04/2024)

Vedder's illustration (Fig. 3.2) of Elizabeth having her hair brushed while sitting by the window also includes books scattered beside her on the floor, one of which is suggestive of a loose-leaf notepad, which may be where she kept her garden observations or other writing. This again may be viewed as an indication of her interest in the garden rather than the indoor spaces deemed suitable for women of her position and mitigates against the convention of the passive woman at the window.

In both *Elizabeth and her German Garden* and *The Solitary Summer* it is the outdoor space of the garden which enables Elizabeth to practice her version of femininity. On May 16th she writes, for example that 'The garden is the place I go to for refuge and shelter, not the house. In the house are

duties and annoyances, servants to exhort and admonish, furniture and meals …'.[352] In her contribution to a collection of essays about the literary connections between von Arnim and her cousin Katherine Mansfield, Fiehn[353] identifies the importance of the work of the Brontë sisters in the lives of the two women and in *The Solitary Summer* von Arnim describes Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* as one of her favourite books.[354] In many of these novels, and in *Wuthering Heights* in particular, the window is a framing device and symbolises the barrier between public and private, male and female: one of restriction and containment and the other of liberty and independence. Von Arnim will have been familiar with the use of this device from her reading, connoting as it does passivity and restraint, the longing for elsewhere. As she does with the space of the garden, von Arnim subverts the conventional trope of the passivity of the woman at the window. The device of using a door, a gate or a window served to emphasise the boundary between the domestic space and the public, separated from the outside world by a physical barrier such as a garden wall or hedge.[355] The notion of the bounded and secure interior and the compromising exterior is replicated in Bachelard's[356] discussion of the 'primal' significance of the open door, which he suggests can signify 'hesitation, temptation, desire, security'[357] and resonates with representations of the woman at the window. However, rather than view space in conventionally oversimplified terms, Rose (like many other feminist geographers) argues that 'space is multi-dimensional, shifting and contingent'.[358] In von Arnim's garden romances the established hierarchies of space which articulate specific perceptions of power and gender are undermined by the

352 Von Arnim, E. (1898) p.26.The Dulwich Picture Gallery exhibition, *Reframed: The Woman in the Window,* 4 May- 4 September 2022, examines how the device of the woman in the window has been used in 'painting, print, photography and film to reflect on gender and the visibility of women, ranging from empathy to voyeurism' DPG website 27/06/2022.

353 Fiehn, C. '[P]assionate, magnificent prose': Tracing the Brontës in the Friendship and Writings of Elizabeth von Arnim and Katherine Mansfield in Kimber, G. Maddison, I and Martin, T. eds (2021) *Katherine Mansfield and Elizabeth von Arnim*, Edinburgh University Press. Turner also claims that 'von Arnim was well read in nineteenth century literature', citing both the Bronte's work and that of George Eliot. Turner, N. ibid.

354 Von Arnim, E. (1899) p.21.

355 Page and Smith point out that the garden represented in literature was also 'a training ground for children' (Page and Smith, 2014:17), a safe space in which adult roles could be played out.

356 Bachelard, G. (2014) *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas, Penguin Classics.

357 Bachelard, G. (2014), p.234.

358 Rose, G. (1993), p. 140.

represented Elizabeth. Elizabeth is not described as sitting passively at her window, observing the world outside. Her engagement with the outside space takes place not only when she is physically in the garden itself; instead, she opens the window and connects with the garden: 'Each morning the simple act of opening my bedroom windows is the means of giving me an ever-recurring pleasure. Just underneath them is a border of rockets in full flower … and they send up their good morning scent the moment they see me leaning out'.[359] In both novels von Arnim uses the device of the woman at the window, but deploys it in less conventional terms – Elizabeth breaches the space between interior and exterior both symbolically and physically.

In many ways *The Solitary Summer* continues some of the themes first raised in *Elizabeth and her German Garden* and the use of the space of the garden as a site of exploration and reflection. There are also, however, echoes of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (based on two lectures given in 1928 and first published in 1929). Although the thrust of Woolf's argument is that a woman should 'have money and a room of her own if she is to write'[360] the emphasis on a space for women is echoed in von Arnim's use of the garden in *The Solitary Summer*. Pages fifteen to twenty-two feature a discussion of Elizabeth's reading of various philosophers, all of which take place in different spots in her gardens. These readings are pitted against the constraints of domestic life 'when the soul is crushed out of sight and sense by cutlets and asparagus and revengeful sweet things' during 'those dreary lunch-ridden hours'[361] when she must entertain her guests and minister to the needs of her children. In her self-deprecating and humorous manner von Arnim argues for a space in which a woman can intellectualise, if not actually write. Like Virginia Woolf, she seeks a space of her own in which to work uninterrupted: 'I have dreams of having a little cottage built there, with daisies up to the door, and no path of any sort …

[359] Von Arnim, E. (1899), p.32.
[360] Woolf, V. (1929) *A Room of One's Own*, Hogarth Press.
[361] Von Arnim, E. (1899), p.17.

I know the exact spot where it should stand'.[362] This description of a space of her own in the garden is followed by an account of a conversation she has with a group of women at a dinner party who fail to understand her wish for a degree of solitude, but who then go on to gossip about women's experiences at the hands of their husbands, '"Ah, these husbands!" sighed the ample lady, lugubriously shaking her head; "they shut up their wives because it suits them, and don't care what their sufferings are"'.[363] The garden allows Elizabeth the possibility of writing freely, but also to exercise her intelligence through her reading of philosophy, another unconventionality which shocked not only her fictional guests, but also her cousin, Katherine Mansfield.

The bounded space of Elizabeth's garden, her garden, enables a realm of un-limiting possibilities and is expressed most keenly in *The Solitary Summer*, where she reads philosophy in the garden.

> … shaded by the low-hanging branches of a great beech-tree from more than flickering sunshine. Through these branches I can see a group of giant poppies just coming into flower, flaming out beyond the trees on the grass, and further down a huge silver birch, its first spring green not yet deepened out of delicacy … Here I read Goethe.[364]

For von Arnim, this physical space is a necessary pre-requisite for the opportunity to think and write, both activities which she acknowledges are generally seen as unfitting for women, "But here I am, talking about Goethe, our great genius and idol, in a way that no woman should".[365] Elizabeth's garden diaries describe the routine and the quotidian, but refuse to be confined or defined by them. In representing Elizabeth as a woman who philosophises in the garden, Von Arnim challenges conventional associations of the female with the small and constricted, limited by the domestic, both physically and intellectually.

[362] Von Arnim, E. (1898), p.29. Writing about the place where Thomas de Quincy read Kant, Baudelaire described a 'white cottage sat at the end of a little valley, shut in by rather high mountains; and it seemed to be swathed in shrubs' quoted in Bachelard (2014:60).
[363] Von Arnim, E. (1898), p.29.
[364] Von Arnim, E. (1899), p.18.
[365] Von Arnim, E. (1899), p.92.

The garden also offers another form of sanctuary for Elizabeth: an opportunity to absent herself from others, to not be observed. She finds places in the garden where she cannot be seen, 'It is so private there .. that it is one of my favourite places … the servants cannot see me as I stand there enjoying myself. The loveliest garden is spoilt to my thinking by the impossibility of getting out of sight of the house, which stares down at you, Argus-eyed and unblinking'.[366] The idea of being unobserved is important to Elizabeth and it is only in the garden where she is able to hide and absent herself from the gaze of others. Von Arnim sets out the demands which each set of people make on Elizabeth: the Babies require her to be a mother, her husband (the Man of Wrath) requires her to be a wife, neighbours require her to be a competent housekeeper and friends require her to be a congenial host. By finding a refuge away from others, all of whom are for the most part located in the house, Elizabeth can engage in a form of femininity not confined to the domestic. The limitations and constraints contained within the house are emphasised in another passage: 'In the middle of this plain is the oasis of birdcherries and greenery where I spend my happy days, and in the middle of the oasis is a grey stone house with many gables where I pass my reluctant nights'.[367]

The association of femininity, gardening and morality are reflected in ideas of boundaries and the *hortus conclusus* and mirror notions of containment, of interior spaces which are secure and which women may inhabit safe from the compromising exterior world. Overlapping with the retreats which Bending[368] describes in his work and reflecting his subjects' experience of restriction, the *hortus conclusus* has also been viewed as a floral cage.[369] Elizabeth's descriptions of her garden point to a very different environment where women may be encouraged to push against the boundaries of the

[366] Von Arnim, E. (1899) p.84. Referring to Foucault, Moine makes the point, p 10, that the house has panoptical control/observation. Fabienne Moine Elizabeth's Garden Memoirs: Cultivating Feminism?, Cahiers victoriens et edouradiens, 77 Spring 2013, http://journals.openedition.org/cve/353
[367] Von Arnim, E. (1898) p.4.
[368] Bending. S. (2013)
[369] The idea of a floral cage is also referred to in Carter, T. (1984) *The Victorian Garden*, Salem N.H. Press, and quoted in Harris, D. (1994) Cultivating Power: The Language of Feminism in Women's Garden Literature 1870-1920. *Landscape Journal*, Fall 1994, Vol. 13, No.2 pp113-123

garden, metaphorically and physically. Von Arnim's garden romances represent the woman experiencing the garden not as an extension of the domestic and nor as one where she languidly reclines, but as a space where she has agency. It is, nevertheless, a space which is easily breached: The Man of Wrath, visitors and the Babies often interrupt and O'Connell rightly points to the way in which the garden as a male retreat differs from the female experience. Although there are a number of occasions where von Arnim refers to the garden as a refuge, 'Oh a garden is a sweet, sane refuge to have!',[370] she is not using the idea of refuge in its conventional sense. For Elizabeth the garden provides an opportunity for wider engagement in matters which are less domestic: reading philosophy, considering the depredations of animals on her planting, deliberating the suitability of varieties of rose to use on her plot. The garden is a private sanctuary where Elizabeth feels restored to herself, or is able to be herself, freed from the constraints of what others define as appropriate forms of femininity. For Elizabeth, the garden is never a *hortus conclusus* that circumscribes her femininity. On the contrary, it is a space which actually expands her experience and enables her to create an alternative to conventionally accepted definitions of femininity.

3.7 Positioning

Both Isobel Maddison and Römhild[371] emphasise the concept of gender performance in von Arnim's work:

> The interaction between underlying seriousness and seemingly inconsequential narrative prose that von Arnim constructs creates a complex narrative space through which gendered norms are challenged. This approach underscores the *performance* of gender by *using* frippery, satirizing the ideals of "femininity", and so giving license to subversion in a style acceptable for a wide readership.[372]

Römhild examines the use of performance and masquerade, exploring what she describes as the various 'self-representations of von Arnim's first person narrators'.[373] These studies raise the question

[370] Von Arnim, E. (1898) p. 83.
[371] Römhild, J. (2014).
[372] Maddison, I. (2013) P.2.
[373] Römhild, J. (2014) p.8.

of masquerade and performance as feminist or feminine strategies which provide a useful tool for analysis for the purposes of this research. The female accomplishments, or forms of expression, to be encouraged in girls and women which supported conventional notions of femininity were, argues Poovey, 'characterized by indirection'.[374] Elizabeth's involvement with her garden, however, is characterised by directness: she wishes to cultivate and dig and organise and she also reads philosophy in the garden, engaging directly with the thoughts of these scholars. For Elizabeth, gardening and being in the garden thus become an act of defiance, challenging conventional notions of femininity.

Like most other writers I have referred to, Römhild and Maddison discuss the literary strategies employed by von Arnim, which are useful in providing context, but their focus is not on the garden itself. Elizabeth describes how she is able to 'slink out with a spade and rake and feverishly dig a little piece of ground and break it up and sow surreptitious ipomaea, and run back very hot and guilty into the house and get into a chair behind a book and look languid just in time to save my reputation' [375] [my emphasis] – the rest of this page shows how she differs from the other women she meets in preferring the garden to the town. The use of the term 'languid' is particularly apposite and freighted with meaning, one which may be applied to any number of the paintings in which women feature in the garden. Consciously referring to the need to 'get into a chair behind a book and look languid' is an indication of the idea of the need for the performance of a version of femininity which is acceptable to her husband and to society generally. Similarly, Elizabeth is aware of the necessity of appearing, or 'performing femininity', in the following passage:

> I am always happy (out of doors, be it understood, for indoors there are servants and furniture) but in quite different ways …and there were days last winter when I danced for sheer joy out in my frost-bound garden, in spite of my years and children. But I did it behind a bush, having a due regard for the decencies.[376]

[374] Poovey, M. (1984) p.28.
[375] Von Arnim, E. (1898) p.20.
[376] Von Arnim, E. (1898) p.3.

Languid femininity is perfectly captured, for example, by Sorolla in his painting of his wife and daughters (Fig.3.3), arms stretched out along the seat, hands entwined and the dog sleeping at their feet.

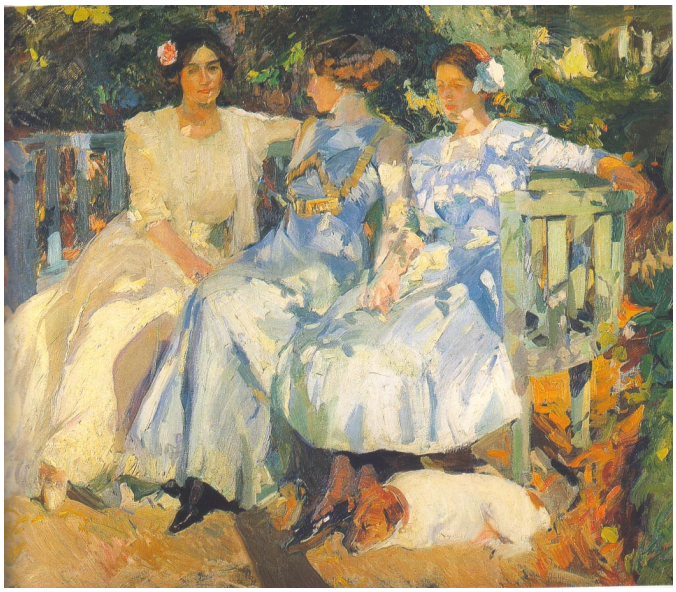

Fig. 3.3
Sorolla, J. (1910) *My Wife and Daughters in the Garden*
Available at: https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Joaqu%C3%ADn_Sorolla_-_My_Wife_and_Daughters_in_the_Garden.jpg&oldid=702217599
Wikimedia Commons. (Acc. 06.06.2023)

Sargent captures the moment in his portrait of a woman reading a book (Fig. 3.4). Naturalness and the alignment of women and children with nature is similarly emphasised in Sargent's painting of a woman asleep with a child in a punt (Fig 3.5).

Fig. 3.4
Sargent, J.S. *In a Garden in Corfu* (1909),
Available at: https://www.wikiart.org/en/john-singer-sargent/in-the-garden-corfu-1909
Wikimedia Commons
(Acc. 06/06/2022)

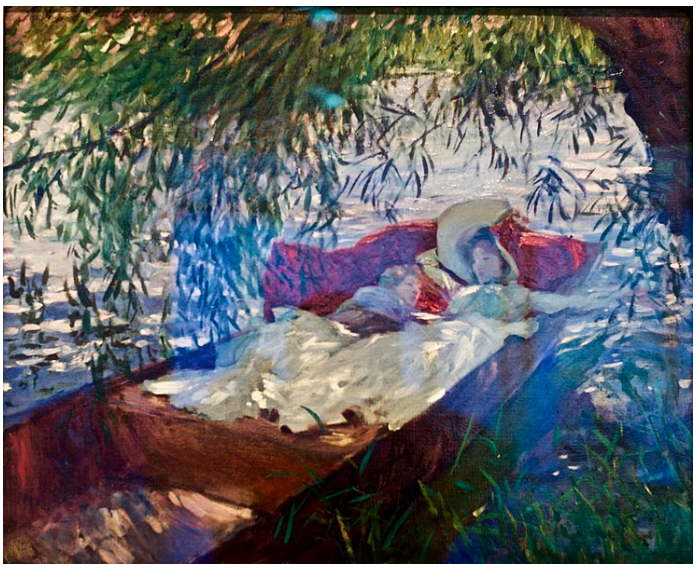

Fig.3.5
Sargent, J.S. (1887) *Lady and Child Asleep in a Punter*
Available at:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Lady_and_Child_asleep_in_a_punter_under_the_willows_(1887)_-_John_Singer_Sargent_(1886_-_1925)_(30462902862).jpg&oldid=655129476 (Acc. 06.06.2023)

In *The Solitary Summer* von Arnim writes about the necessity of the lunchtime ritual that she is 'punished' by having to 'come back and live through those dreary luncheon-ridden hours, when the soul is crushed out of sight and sense by cutlets and asparagus and revengeful sweet things,' aware that this is what a woman must do to be 'a respectable wife and mother'.[377] She describes herself as beginning to be 'shocked at the blackness of my nails',[378] a clear indication that Elizabeth is at times an active gardener. In *Elizabeth and her German Garden*, von Arnim demonstrates a keen eye for 'acceptable' versions of femininity. At a dinner with some local women she describes how they are unable to understand how Elizabeth would prefer the countryside to winter in the town. She responds, 'I enjoyed the winter immensely ..I sleighed and skated and then there were the children and shelves and shelves full of - I was going to say books, but stopped. Reading is an occupation for men: for women it is a reprehensible waste of time'.[379] Of course, the kind of reading that was acceptable for women was the commercial novel which flooded the female reading market at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. From the accounts given in *Elizabeth and her German Garden* and *The Solitary Summer* this is not the material which Elizabeth prefers.

In its own way, Von Arnim's work challenges prevailing gender norms and it is the garden which most frequently allows her the space in which to do this, usually juxtaposing her activity there with the expectations of the domestic life expected of her within the house. Like Jane Loudon, von Arnim embraced a range of positions both personally and professionally and like Jane Loudon, von Arnim rejected the feminism of the New Woman and feminist movements, leading scholars to argue that von Arnim's attitude towards feminism and femininity are often at odds. Römhild for example, argues that 'von Arnim's feminist allegiances are contradictory and ambivalent',[380] and O'Connell also claims that

[377] Von Arnim, E. (1898) p.17.
[378] Von Arnim, E. (1898) p.12.
[379] Von Arnim, E. (1898) p.29.
[380] Römhild, J. (2014) p.6.

von Arnim's work expresses her 'ambivalent attitudes towards femininity and feminism'.[381] Much of the critique surrounding von Arnim's 'ambivalent attitude' towards feminism is based on her representation of the New Woman. In *Elizabeth and her German Garden* the New Woman is characterised as Minora, for whom von Arnim clearly has little sympathy. Most chroniclers of von Arnim's work suggest, like Römhild and O'Connell, that she found it difficult to reconcile 'the feminist cause for aesthetic reasons'.[382] Although Minora, and what she represents, is subject to a degree of ridicule in the novel, there is no doubt that many of the issues surrounding the discourse of the New Woman find sympathetic reference in von Arnim's work. Miller argues that many Edwardian women writers were looking for new narratives in which to place women, outside of the conventional one of courtship followed by marriage. The challenges to motherhood and marriage which are described in *Elizabeth and her German Garden* evidence a break with traditional ideas of maternity and femininity and align with early notions of feminism. Von Arnim's views on education for women, rights to property and employment mirror the demands made by those campaigning more actively for women's rights, but heavily lampooned by many.[383] In her discussion of the work of Jane Austen, Poovey suggests that,

> Writing from inside the ideology of propriety, Austen gradually perfected a form of irony that enabled her to present her personal values in such a way as to make them seem natural correctives to the restrictions of decorum. [Thus enabling her to] achieve[d] the freedom necessary not only to identify this ideology but – always tactfully and with ladylike restraint – to criticize the way it shaped and deformed women's desires.[384]

[381] O'Connell, R. (2017) p.3.

[382] Römhild, J. (2017) p. 10. See also Ledger, S. (1997) *The New Woman. Fiction and Feminism at the fin de siècle,* Manchester University Press*;* Miller, J.E. (1994) *Rebel Women. Feminism, Modernism and the Edwardian Novel,* Virago *Press;* Schaffer, T. (2000) *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes*, The University Press of Virginia and Cunningham, A.R. (1973) The "New Woman Fiction"of the 1890's, *Victorian Studies,* Dec 1973, Vol. 17, No. 2 pp177-186 all explore the relationship between aestheticism and the New Woman.

[383] Dowling, L. (1979) The Decadent and the New Woman in the 1890's in *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Mar., 1979, Vol.33, No 4, pp434-453; Showalter, E. (1990) *Sexual Anarchy. Gender and culture at the fin de siècle*, Viking (Penguin Group) are two of the many writers who identify concerns which linked the New Woman with the decline of civilisation in the minds of many, articulated by Max Beerbohm, for example, and satirized in *Punch*.

[384] Poovey, M. (1984) p. 47.

The way that von Arnim situates her work within the prevailing discourse around the role of women and femininity reflects Poovey's framing of the work of Jane Austen. Although it might not be possible to categorise von Arnim as a feminist, Turner articulates her position most clearly, claiming that she 'is making a feminist point'.[385] The female protagonists of many of von Arnim's later novels are women who find themselves patronized by men (and often women too), trapped through lack of education and experience, objectified, and lacking in agency: the experiences of these women shadow the pages of von Arnim's garden romances.

3.8 A horticultural woman

I have referred throughout this study to the association of women with flowers,[386] a relationship which reached its apotheosis during the late nineteenth century and continued into the beginning of the twentieth century. In her 'garden romances' von Arnim effectively disrupts this symbol system,[387] challenging essentialist views of women and nature even as she situates the woman in the garden. The delicate work of looking after indoor plants was seen as a more suitable occupation for women because of their 'naturally' caring nature and smaller constitution and in her work on botany and women, Shteir notes that 'botany accorded with conventional ideas about women's nature and "natural" roles'.[388] The restricted and restricting depiction of the woman as the 'Angel in the House',[389] described by Patmore

[385] Turner, N. (2017), p. 59.

[386] See Waters, M. (1988) *The Garden in Victorian Literature*, Scolar Press; Shteir, A. (1996) *Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science*, Johns Hopkins University Press, for example. As recently as 1999 Jaqui Gabb wrote that: 'The garden and its flowers represent and symbolise femininity' (1999:258). On the BBC programme 'Gardener's World' she writes: 'The female viewer thereby feels comfortable within the narrative of the garden as it offers her an expression of her own (constructed) maternalism' (1999:258) Gabb, J. (1999) Consuming the Garden: Locating a Feminine Narrative Within Popular Cultural Texts and Gendered Genres, in Stokes, J. and Reading, A. eds. (1999) *The media in Britain. Current debates and developments,* Palgrave

[387] See Ardis, A. (1989) *New Women, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism*, NJ Rutgers University Press, who uses this term.

[388] Shteir, A. (1996) p.35.

[389] First published in 1854, the poem continued to be developed in parts until 1862. Although not generally regarded as a very good poem, it has been the subject of study for the depiction it gives of the ideal woman and finds echoes in the work of Kate Chopin and Thomas Hardy. Millais' portrait of Patmore's wife and Julia Cameron's photograph have the same name. Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote an essay titled *The Extinct Angel* (1891) in reaction to the description such was the representational hold that the poem maintained.

in the poem he dedicated to his wife, enshrined the characteristics of the ideal woman and was, for von Arnim, a representation of the woman she found difficult to be and which she challenged in her writing. Patmore's poem gained considerable popularity and was praised by John Ruskin for describing women as essential to the maintenance of a moral household. *The Angel in the House* promoted the idea that men and women were 'naturally' suited to different spheres of activity, consolidating notions of femininity as passive and domestic and informing representations of women. The traction created by this poem continued to be reflected well into the twentieth century when Virginia Woolf in her speech 'Professions for Women' (delivered to the National Society for Women's Service in 1931) claimed that she had to 'kill her' in order that she herself could write as freely as she wished. Von Arnim's own conflicting attitudes are reflected in *Elizabeth and her German Garden*, where she uses the supposedly natural space of the garden to challenge the idea of 'natural' gender roles.

Waters, in his discussion of Victorian literature, writes that, 'because of the peculiarly appropriate associations of the garden – with love, beauty, nature and leisure – no other part of the domestic sphere is more obviously consonant with the ideological project that seeks to beautify, sanctify and naturalize the confinement of women to it'.[390] In *Elizabeth and her German Garden* von Arnim openly challenges this 'ideological project'. She writes that 'I could never see that delicacy of constitution is pretty, either in plants or women'.[391] Elizabeth yearns to be able to do the work of gardening herself: 'If only I could dig and plant myself! How much easier, besides being so fascinating, to make your own holes exactly where you want them and put in your plants exactly how you choose…' and,

> In the first ecstasy of having a garden all my own, and in my burning impatience to make waste places blossom like a rose. I did one warm Sunday in last year's April during the servants' dinner hour, doubly secure from the gardener by the day and the dinner, slink out with a spade and rake and feverishly dig a little piece of ground and break it up and sow surreptitious ipomaea.[392]

[390] Waters, M. (1988) *The Garden in Victorian Literature*, Scolar Press, Aldershot, Cambridge. P.241.
[391] Von Arnim, E. (1898) p.101.
[392] Von Arnim, E. (1898) p.20.

Consistent with her desire to be active in the garden is Elizabeth's wish to learn about the plants she intends to use. On page fourteen of *Elizabeth and her German Garden* von Arnim includes details of what Elizabeth has learned and planted and the practical tasks she has engaged in. A little later, on page sixteen, we read about the varieties of roses she wishes to try and further, on page nineteen, the reader is shown her use of books to learn more about planting and planting practices. Von Arnim is presenting us with a woman who, like Webb Loudon, begins by knowing little about horticulture, but who has an overwhelming wish to learn and, in the process, to rely on her own judgement. The passivity inherent in the female association with flowers is contradicted by the agency with which Elizabeth thinks and acts. In both novels, von Arnim manipulates conventional garden motifs of nature and flowers to challenge perceived gender roles.

Herndon Marshall,[393] in discussing a later work of von Arnim's, *The Pastor's Wife*, comments on the use of ideas of naturalness and the ways in which these are employed to create restrictive and constraining versions of femininity, comparing von Arnim's work with that of George Eliot. Fabricant's[394] study, which explores the symbolism of the feminized and eroticized garden in the eighteenth century, points out that the symbolic association of women with land or nature was reflected in writing which described rivers with sinuous curves and the necessity for gentlemen gardeners to control the 'careless and loose Tresses of Nature'.[395] She argues that, 'The choice of language here underscores the profound interconnections between aesthetic, economic and sexual forms of possession'.[396] Ideas of containment assume more than a metaphorical significance when viewed in this context and Fabricant argues that the language used is not just an occasional figure of speech, but that it is used every day and in fact reflects the ways in which power is structured in society. Lynch also traces the alignment of

[393] Herndon Marshall, A. (2017) Act Natural: Dubious Proposals in *The Mill on the Floss, The Pastor's Wife, Vera* and *Rebecca, Women: A Cultural Review,* 28:1-2. 115-129, https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rwrc20.
[394] Fabricant, C. (1979)
[395] Fabricant, C. (1979) p.129.
[396] Fabricant, C. (1979) p.117.

women and flowers, noting that, 'By Austen's day, the language of bloom supplied novelists with a vehicle that allowed them to signify their female characters' physical development and erotic availability',[397] while in his work, John Loudon referred to conservatories as 'protected worlds of nurture'[398]. These spaces created a whole new horticultural vocabulary with which to describe women and girls and were viewed as uniquely appropriate to the sphere of female activity, not only in the nature of their enclosure, but also that they created a world in miniature.

The alignment of women and nature and the supposed 'naturalness' of the female as suggested by Patmore and promoted by the Victorians is undermined by the agency of the woman that von Arnim represents as Elizabeth in the garden. Elizabeth expresses a blatant dislike for greenhouses, where she not only feels that plants are imprisoned, but that greenhouses raise plants so that they eventually become less able to survive in an outdoor environment. There is a clear correspondence between the greenhouse raised plant and the woman confined to the domestic. Von Arnim effectively shuffles categories of gender and associations of flowers to create a more complex representation of femininity, which supports an alternative narrative of independence. Although von Arnim does occasionally personify flowers as feminine, this is in marked contrast to the descriptions employed by male writers. Von Arnim describes tulips next to hyacinths looking 'like a wholesome, freshly tubbed young girls beside a stout lady whose every movement weighs down the air with patchouli'.[399]

Much of both novels is taken up with accounts of Elizabeth's garden, including plans for the garden, her relationship with her gardeners and her experiences in it. As has been noted elsewhere, the garden is

[397] Lynch, D.S. (2010) "Young Ladies are Delicate Plants": Jane Austen and Greenhouse Romanticism, *ELH*, Vol. 77, No. 3 (Fall 2010) pp 689-729, p691.
[398] Loudon, J. C. (1805) *A short treatise on several improvements made in hothouses*, Printed for the author. P. 72.
[399] Von Arnim, E. (1898) p.102.

described in joyous detail. Elizabeth's descriptions of her garden are without question articulated in sensuous, almost rhapsodic terms,

> Down the garden path, past the copse of lilacs with their swelling dark buds, and the great three-cornered bed of tea roses and pansies in front of it, between rows of china roses and past the lily and foxglove groups, we came last night to the spring garden in the open glade round the old oak; and there, the first to flower of the flowering trees, and standing out like a lovely white naked thing against the dusk of the evening, was a double cherry in full bloom …'.[400]

In *Elizabeth and her German Garden* she writes that,

> … when the anemones went, came a few stray periwinkles and Solomon's Seal, and all the birdcherries blossomed in a burst. And then before I had got used to the joy of their flowers against the sky, came the lilacs – masses and masses of them, in clumps on the grass, with other shrubs and trees by the side of walks, and one great continuous bank of them half a mile log … shining glorious against a background of firs.[401]

The descriptions may be sensuous, but they are never overtly sensual. Plants and nature are never feminised. The identification of women with plants and ideas of 'naturalness' is ruptured in von Arnim's work. The garden is described as a source of happiness and a space which offers the opportunity to engage with nature and to promote feelings of well-being.[402] For Elizabeth the garden offers constant joy,[403] a term which she uses intermittently throughout the two novels to describe her experiences. These expressions of delight feature largely throughout *Elizabeth and her German Garden:* between pages eight and ten, words like 'blissful', delight', 'joy' happiness', 'wonder' and 'beauty' litter the pages as she engages directly with the outdoor space. The garden provides Elizabeth with a liberating

[400] Von Arnim, E. (1898) p.14.
[401] Von Arnim, E. (1898) p.9.
[402] Nature and well-being are a recurring motif in literature as well as more generally. In *Mansfield Park* Fanny Price creates a small garden of geraniums to promote her own well-being. More recently Sue Stuart Smith has published *The Well Gardened Mind* (2021). Monty Don has long promoted gardening as a source of peace and calm, particularly for the benefit of mental health. In 2022 the RHS published *Your Wellbeing Garden.*
[403] Römhild and Galvin offer two accounts of the experience of joy that Elizabeth in *The Solitary Summer* and the female protagonists of von Arnim's later work feel in the garden. For Römhild the garden enables not only feelings of well-being but of personal growth, while for Galvin the garden is a beautiful space situated in opposition to the expectations of an oppressive society. Galvin, R.A.M . (2017) The Spinster in the Garden: Joy and Transcendence on Elizabeth von Arnim's Father and Fraulein Schmidt and Mr. Anstruther. *Women: A Cultural Review,* 28:1-2. 72-85. Romhild, J. (2017) 'So that my soul may have time to grow': Joy and Happiness in Elizabeth von Arnim's Solitary Summer. *Women: A Cultural Review,* 28:1-2. 86-100, https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rwrc20.

environment which she can enjoy independently of anyone else. The title of the book, *Elizabeth and her German Garden*, unapologetically stakes her claim to the space. On page four of the novel Elizabeth establishes the garden as her property, 'My garden"' she writes, 'is surrounded by cornfields and meadows'. She describes the beginnings of her creation using the definitive article, 'The garden was an absolute wilderness', but thereafter throughout the two garden books it is almost invariably referred to as her own, 'I felt I wanted to put my arms right round my garden and hide it from [visitors]'.[404] In doing so, Elizabeth stakes her claim not only to ownership of the garden but also to the range of goods which O'Connell has suggested gardens represent: 'solitude, leisure, pleasure and self-determination'.[405]

Von Arnim dedicates long passages to descriptions of plants and flowers. Pages 15-16 of *Elizabeth and her German Garden* are, for example, devoted to a description of rose varieties which Elizabeth plans to grow, 'How I long for the day when the tea roses open their buds! Never did I look forward so intensely to anything …"'.[406] In planning her spring garden border, Elizabeth proposes a long list of plants and colours in order that, 'You go through a little pine wood, and turning a corner, are to come suddenly upon this bit of captured morning glory. I want it to be blinding in its brightness after the dark, cool path through the wood'.[407] For Elizabeth the flowers are her friends and, in some ways, anthropomorphised. The prospect of growing plants in a greenhouse Elizabeth views as 'imprisoning them for life',[408] a reflection of the restrictions she herself feels inside the four walls of her house. Although both O'Connell and Schaffer[409] suggest that these are long passages of 'boring textual material'[410] creating a barrier not only around the fictional Elizabeth, but between herself and the

[404] Von Arnim, E. (1898) p.66.
[405] O'Connell, R. (2017) p.7.
[406] Von Arnim, E. (1898) p. 16.
[407] Von Arnim, E. (1898) p. 122.
[408] Von Arnim, E. (1898) p. 21.
[409] O'Connell, R. (2017); Schaffer, T. (2000) *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late-Victorian England,* University Press of Virginia.
[410] O'Connell, R. (2017) p.10. Lists of 'boring textual material' seem to be viewed differently depending on the publication and author. James Joyce lists a long catalogue of trees in *Ulysees,* which has not elicited the same response.

reader, which O'Connell describes as 'a set of private practices of refusal and defiance',[411] I would argue that the descriptive passages which von Arnim gives of Elizabeth's plans do look very much like the kinds of proposals, a kind of 'wish list', which a gardener might in practice draw up. The discussion of roses is underpinned by a sound knowledge of varieties and the opinions she offers on their degree of success are based on horticultural practice. Her extensive reading of gardening books, although not named, she views as,

> … an unfailing delight, especially in winter … and [to] read the luscious descriptions of roses and all the other summer glories is one of my greatest pleasures. And then how well I get to know and love those gardens whose gradual development has been described by their owners, and how happily I wander in fancy down the paths of certain specially charming ones in Lancashire, Berkshire, Surrey and Kent, and admire the beautiful arrangement of bed and border …'.[412]

Much of Elizabeth's horticultural practice appears to reflect the proposals of William Robinson who published *The Wild Garden* in 1870 and *The English Flower Garden* in 1883. Although von Arnim does not refer to these specifically, the accounts of Elizabeth's frequent skirmishes with her gardeners are around the subject of different gardening techniques and styles. Robinson promoted a naturalistic style of gardening, a move away from the straight lines to be found in many gardens of the period. Elizabeth observes ' …all through April he [the gardener] went about with a long piece of string making parallel lines in the borders of beautiful exactitude and arranging the poor plants like soldiers at a review'[413] and a little later, 'I could only conclude that he has a personal objection to me because of my eccentric preference for plants in groups rather than plants in lines'.[414] On page 42, she tartly observes that,

> The rockets are all out. The gardener in a fit of inspiration put them right along the very front of two borders, and I don't know what his feelings can be now that they are all flowering and the plants behind are completely hidden … Single rows are a mistake.[415]

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[411] O'Connell, R. (2017) p.12.
[412] Von Arnim, E. (1899) p. 22. Jekyll's garden was in Surrey, Sackville West's in Kent,
[413] Von Arnim, E. (1898) p.19.
[414] Von Arnim, E. (1898) p.19.
[415] Von Arnim, E. (1898) p.42. The 1906 MacMillan edition of the book shows Vedder's illustration to accompany this text which includes the children who are depicted peering at the offending rockets. Although they do not feature as part of Elizabeth's description and one may speculate that Vedder included the girls in this illustration because of the perceived appropriateness of the garden as a space for children (who would have been responsible for this decision is not known).

The impression of a desire for a garden in Robinson-style is evident. In addition to visiting Vita Sackville West, Kime Scott[416] notes that on her visits to England von Arnim was a regular visitor to the Chelsea Flower Show. In 1915 she and her daughter drove to Munstead Wood to take tea with Gertrude Jekyll, but Jekyll's book *Children and Gardens* published in 1906 includes a reference and photograph of von Arnim which indicates that Elizabeth was an already an earlier visitor and familiar with Jekyll's style of planting.[417] Although many of these horticultural visits will have taken place after *Elizabeth and her German Garden* had been published, they demonstrate a keen interest in plants and gardening and it is highly likely that through her associations with people in England, von Arnim would have been familiar with this new style of gardening and may even have read, or heard of, Robinson's work. Her description that, 'what I wanted was a natural effect with no bare spaces of earth'[418] appears to clearly reference Robinson's planting style. She claims to have read '… every gardening book and book about gardens that I believe has been published of late years'.[419] Transposing this more natural style of gardening from England to Germany would no doubt have been perceived as eccentric. E.M. Forster's comment that he did not really see a garden at Nassenheide may be a result of the type of wild, or natural, gardening style which Elizabeth employed, when he may have expected something rather more in keeping with the more formal gardens of the period. In conjunction with, rather than in opposition to, the claims made by others which focus on von Arnim's style of writing and its possible implications, the representation of Elizabeth in *Elizabeth and her German Garden* is of a woman who practiced and was knowledgeable about gardening. Descriptions given by Katherine Mansfield[420] in some of her letters demonstrate not only von Arnim's passion for plants, but that she grew flowers in her garden in

[416] Kime Scott, B. Tracing Garden Networks: Katherine Mansfield and Elizabeth von Arnim in Kimber, G. Maddison, I and Martin, T. eds (2021) *Katherine Mansfield and Elizabeth von Arnim*, Edinburgh University Press.
[417] Jekyll, G. (2004) *Children and Gardens*, Fredonia Books, Amsterdam, page 27 refers to 'The pretty lady in the picture is a German princess'.
[418] Von Arnim, E. (1898) p. 14.
[419] Von Arnim, E. (1898) p. 22.
[420] Mansfield and her husband took lodgings not far from von Arnim's Chalet Soleil in Switzerland and the two women were regular visitors.

Switzerland (she had brought with her the gardener from Nassenheide). Mansfield writes that the two of them talked 'about flowers until we were really drunk […] She - describing 'a certain very exquisite rose, single, pale yellow with coral tipped petals' and so on'.[421] In 1921 Mansfield writes to von Arnim to thank her for '… a whole petunia and nasturtium summer to thank you for'.[422] Elizabeth accurately describes the plants and shrubs in her garden by season and evidently understand that hepaticas, for example, will grow in semi-shaded places under trees. A characteristic of novels written by non-gardeners lacking in horticultural knowledge is to describe gardens which include varieties of plants together which would not grow in the same season, narcissi and roses for example. Von Arnim was, however, evidently an informed gardener able to distinguish perennials from annuals, soil types, species of rose (among many others) and correct flowering times[423] and this experience, I suggest, is reflected in the descriptions of Elizabeth's German garden. Elizabeth's descriptions of plantings are all drawn from experience, whether of her own garden or those of others. Just as today's gardeners are encouraged to study plant catalogues during the winter months in preparation for spring, Elizabeth, instead of preparing for Christmas, writes that she has,

> … often locked myself up in a room alone …to study the flower catalogues and make my lists of seeds and shrubs and trees for the spring … I want to have a border all yellow, every shade of yellow from fieriest orange to nearly white and the amount of studying of gardening books it costs me will only be appreciated by beginners like myself.[424]

In this passage too the influence of a more naturalistic style of planting may be seen and she scathingly remarks that the gardener 'thinks a yellow bed should be calceolarias edged with blue',[425] no doubt referring to the popularity of bedding out calceolarias that was fashionable at the time.

[421] Kime Scott, B. Tracing Garden Networks: Katherine Mansfield and Elizabeth von Arnim in Kimber, G. Maddison, I. and Martin, T. eds (2021) *Katherine Mansfield and Elizabeth von Arnim*, Edinburgh University Press. P.31.
[422] Cited in Kime Scott in Kimber, Maddison and Martin eds. (2021)
[423] See von Arnim (1898) p. 20 for example.
[424] Von Arnim, E. (1898) p. 12.
[425] Von Arnim, E. (1898) p. 123.

3.9 The 1906 illustrated edition of *Elizabeth and her German Garden* - a note

Unlike earlier editions of *Elizabeth and her German Garden*, the 1906 Macmillan edition of von Arnim's novel included illustrations. The 15 illustrations were by Simon Harmon Vedder (1866 – 1937),[426] whose work is also associated with later editions of Walter Scott's novels and those of William Thackeray. Vedder's illustrations in von Arnim's book, in the main, represent typical garden images, with six featuring children, or mother and children, while four of these are of the children only. Of the remaining pictures, just two are of Elizabeth inside the house and one of these is of Elizabeth having her hair brushed by her maid and referred to above.

The Frontispiece of this edition is of Elizabeth in relaxed pose on a garden bench among her beloved 'bird cherries'. In essence there is little to distinguish this portrait from any of the conventional paintings of women in gardens.

[426] Vedder had studied both in Paris and New York and became moderately successful. He had apparently travelled round Europe with Colonel Bill Cody and eventually to England and some of his work is a portrayal of the 'wild west' embodied in Cody's touring show. From the information available, it is clear that Vedder also enjoyed a degree of success as a portrait painter and sculptor. In Europe he met his wife, Eva Roos, and both became well-known illustrators.

"THERE ARE SO MANY BIRD-CHERRIES ROUND ME, GREAT TREES WITH BRANCHES SWEEPING THE GRASS"—p. 2.

Fig. 3.6.
Vedder, S. H. (1906)
'There are so many bird-cherries round me, great trees with branches sweeping the grass'.
Available at: Available at: https://archive.org/details/elizabethhergerm00elizuoft/page/n9/mode/2up
(Acc.12/04/2024)

Yet the solitary figure of Elizabeth dominates the image, even in repose. She is not reading or sewing, the conventional female garden activities, but has one arm bent supporting her head, while the other leans on the arm of the seat as she gazes at the blossom around her. The sense is of a woman actively considering her surroundings. Von Arnim's description here luxuriates in the beauty of her garden and sets it out for the reader. She describes how the garden is surrounded by cornfields and how,

> 'in the middle of this oasis of bird cherries and greenery where I spend my happy days, and in the middle of this oasis is the gray stone house .. where I pass my reluctant nights'.[427]

The text makes the contrast between house and garden, outdoor and indoor, immediately clear.

[427] Von Arnim, E. (1906) *Elizabeth and her German Garden*, archive.org. Electronic. P. 3. Accessed 12 /04/2024.

Elizabeth's garden notes for May 10th describe the beginning of her gardening journey and the early condition of the garden as 'an absolute wilderness'. This entry refers to her planting of rose beds, her failures with hollyhocks and lilies and her mistake with ipomaea, as well as a critical reference to German gardening books. The accompanying illustration is of her three daughters in the garden around a sundial. The notes for June 3rd are similarly lengthy and detailed, describing what is in flower and how, 'The gardener … put [the rockets] right along he very front of two borders and … now that they are all flowering … the plants behind have been completely hidden'. (von Arnim, 1906).[428] Here again, the three girls, not referred to in the text, are pictured along the garden path next to the offending rockets.

Fig.3.7
Vedder, S.H. (1906)
'The rockets are all out'
Available at: Available at: https://archive.org/details/elizabethhergerm00elizuoft/page/n9/mode/2up
(Acc.12/04/2024)

[428] Von Arnim, E. (1906) ibid P. 42.

Although neither of these garden notes discusses children in the garden, one may speculate that Vedder included the girls in these two illustrations because of the perceived appropriateness of the garden as a space for children, although who would have been responsible for this decision is not known. There are, nevertheless, points at which von Arnim makes clear reference to the children, for example on page 24 she writes that the 'June baby' seized 'a stick much bigger than herself and went after the cows'. Yet the motive for pursuing the cows is that they had escaped their enclosure and were in danger of trampling 'down a border of pinks and lilies' and 'were grazing perilously near my tea-roses and most precious belongings'.[429] The reason for the description and inclusion of the child are clear – it is to protect Elizabeth's planting.

Fig. 3.8
Vedder, S.H. (1906)
'The June baby … seized a stick much bigger than herself and went after the cows.'
Available at: Available at: https://archive.org/details/elizabethhergerm00elizuoft/page/n9/mode/2up (Acc.12/04/2024)

[429] Von Arnim, E. (1906) ibid P. 24

In many ways, Vedder's illustrations epitomise a conventional female figure in the garden and which have more in common with the images discussed in Chapter One, somewhat at odds with the character that von Arnim represents in her writing: on page 36[430] she stands with her arms full of lilac blossoms, on page 40[431] she sits daydreaming by a stream with a book of poetry in her hand and on page 46[432] Elizabeth is shown taking tea in the garden and musing on the value of Sundays when the garden is quiet and she can sit still in the garden and observe and consider her horticultural failures and successes. The illustration on page 46, however, is slightly at odds with von Arnim's text. Vedder's illustration describes a quintessentially English scene of tea in the garden, remarkably similar to the one of Mrs. Durham in *Maurice* referred to in Chapter One. This is the entry for June 11th 'when the dejected gardener went mad' and 'the long borders … are looking dreadful', von Arnim writes, ' sitting here in this shady corner watching the lazy shadows stretching themselves across the grass, and listening to the rooks quarrelling in the treetops'[433] - the afternoon tea itself does not feature in von Arnim's description of Elizabeth in the garden. Vedder's illustration represents a conventional image of a woman in her garden taking afternoon tea and not one who is considering how successful her poppies and delphiniums have been.

[430] Illustration, "Oh those lilac bushes! … I have brought in armfuls".
[431] Illustration, "Sitting on a willow trunk beside a little stream, forget the very existence of everything but green pastures and still water".
[432] Illustration, "Sitting here in a shady corner watching the lazy shadows stretching themselves across the grass".
[433] Von Arnim, E. (1906) p.46.

Fig. 3.9
Vedder, S.H. (1906)
'Sitting here in a shady corner watching the lazy shadows stretching themselves across the grass'.
Available at: https://archive.org/details/elizabethhergerm00elizuoft/page/n9/mode/2up
(Acc.12/04/2024)

Some of Vedder's illustrations no doubt represent Elizabeth to the reader as an unconventional woman: one who takes tea outside in the winter, who picks armfuls of lilac to bring in for the house, who berates the gardener for planting rockets in the wrong place and who is pleased that the June baby chases away cows to protect the plants. I would suggest, however, that this is on the level of a mild eccentricity rather than indicating her sustained interest in horticulture and her use of the space of the garden as an opportunity to undermine more conventional aspects of the feminine role. It may also be that a text which refuses easy classification, variously described as a diary, a journal or a novel,

may be more difficult to illustrate. The illustrations for the 'unruly text'[434] created by von Arnim may have been reframed in more conventional terms, driven by the commercial imperatives of publishing and marketing.

3.10 Conclusion

The majority of writing on von Arnim's work reflects a reading of the garden as an essentially passive retreat, although it is seen to allow Elizabeth the opportunity to exercise her intellectual and physical capacities. I have argued that *Elizabeth and her German Garden* and *The Solitary Summer* provoke a direct challenge to these notions of retreat and seclusion. The notion of retreat identified by Bending, for example, and lived out by women such as Lady Luxborough or Louisa Johnson where the garden became an enclosed space in which to be confined or to escape 'the disappointments in life' is not the retreat represented by Elizabeth, where she revels in the sheer joy of her surroundings. In her representation of Elizabeth in her garden von Arnim appropriates conventional tropes of the woman in the garden and overturns them.

The garden which Elizabeth creates is an intensely personal space and one which she makes her own. It is not created for the display of wealth or status or for Elizabeth to demonstrate her horticultural skills to others. Usborne further suggests that the novel included what she describes as von Arnim's 'personal manifesto':

> If your lot makes you cry and be wretched, get rid of it and take another: strike out for yourself; don't listen to the shrieks of your relations, to their gibes or their entreaties; don't let your own microscopic set prescribe your goings out and comings in; don't be afraid of public opinion in the shape of the neighbour in the next house, when all the world is before you new and shining, and everything is possible, if you will only be energetic and independent and seize opportunity by the scruff of the neck.[435]

[434] See, for example, Weinstein, *A. Literature and Medicine, suppl. Special Issue: Unruly Texts;* Baltimore Vol. 16, Iss. 1. (Spring 1997): 1-22. John Hopkins University Press. Thanks to Andrew Teverson for introducing me to the term.
[435] Von Arnim, E. (1898) p.148.

The Elizabeth who is represented in the garden is far from the conventional woman of the period and it is in the space of the garden where she is able to engage with the possibilities of alternative femininities. The symbolic association of the garden with possibilities of pleasure, self-determination and creativity pointed to by O'Connell, underpins Elizabeth's experience of it. Von Arnim represents Elizabeth in the garden when she is at her freest, while the house remains a place of restraint and convention and the two novels are full of references to the constraining conventions of female household life. The represented Elizabeth confronts convention with her directness.

Von Arnim's garden romances openly challenge the identification of women with plants. The historic association of women and land ably argued by Fabricant who points to the sexuality of the early descriptions of the 'female parts' of plants to the description of Capability Brown as 'Lady Nature's second husband'[436] is inverted by Elizabeth. Although descriptions of flowers are often sensuous, for example 'the perfect beauty of colour and scent' of lupins 'bathed in the mild August sunshine',[437] they do not align gardens, plants and the female as one sensual image. Although ideas of naturalness permeate the garden romances, for von Arnim nature is never feminised.[438]

Readings of von Arnim's work interpret her position on femininity and feminism differently, variously constructing the garden as refuge or sanctuary. These layers of complexity find their reflection in the ways that the space of the garden and that of the domestic interior enable different versions of femininity to be represented in von Arnim's work. Here the garden is represented as a more fluid space and not trapped in oppositional terms. Like Jane Loudon, von Arnim was negotiating problematic territory, working within the constraints of male dominated structures. In the same way that many writers of the period, such as Mrs. Gaskell or George Eliot, questioned what they perceived to be

[436] Cited in Fabricant (1979), Dorothy Stroud, *Capability Brown* (1950) rev. ed. Country Life 1957, p198.
[437] Von Arnim, E. (1898) p. 132.
[438] See also Herndon Marshall (2017) and Turner (2017).

issues within the domestic situation, she did not actually challenge the institution of marriage itself. As O'Connell puts it, 'Elizabeth's rebellion, if we can call it such, constitutes not a frontal assault on the barricades, but rather a set of private practices of refusal and defiance'.[439] Von Arnim's work was widely read and the garden romances were hugely popular. Although they may not have presented an open challenge to patriarchal structures, they no doubt expressed a brand of dissatisfaction felt by many women at the time and it is through the garden that these are articulated.

There is an increasing recognition of the work of von Arnim in literary history and its place in feminist studies of the fin de siècle, but none examine horticultural practice and the role of the garden as a space where challenges to the dominant discourse of femininity take place. In this chapter I have provided a horticultural reading of *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* and *The Solitary Summer* and have argued that the representation of the garden and Elizabeth's horticultural practice in these two novels presents an opportunity to re-assess the garden as a significant space for the social construction of femininity.

[439] O'Connell, R. (2017) p. 12.

Fig.4.1
Poster for *The Draughtsman's Contract* (1982)© BFI National Archive
Available at: https://www.bfi.org.uk/features/papers-plans-diagrams-making-draughtsmans-contract
(Acc. 6 May 2023)

> My prime interests are the landscape, the ideas involved in the sheer interplay of plot, the symmetry, and those concerns characteristic of the whole sub-text of gardening; also the games that can be played with the dialogue, its content and the forms it takes. It's a very literary film, the dialogue has been very carefully worked out for puns and conceits. The whole thing is an elaborate charade, a conceit, which the 17th century enjoyed doing, witness Restoration Tragedy.[440]

4.1 Introduction

I begin this chapter with a quotation by Peter Greenaway in which he refers to *The Draughtsman's Contract* as an 'elaborate conceit' with a 'whole sub-text of gardening' and reveals how carefully the film was planned both in terms of landscape, but also in its dialogue, with the actors 'under strict orders to speak the lines as written'.[441] *The Draughtsman's Contract* has been described as both a country house film, a comedy of manners (along the lines of Restoration comedy) and a murder mystery within

[440] (Programme notes and credits compiled by the BFI Documentation Unit Monthly Film Bulletin 1982)
[441] Botting, J. (2022) Papers, plans, diagrams: the making of The Draughtsman's Contract. BFI website https://www.bfi.org.uk/features/papers-plans-diagrams-making-draughtsmans-contract. Acc. 26.03.2023.

which Greenaway knits together what might be described as key historical elements of landscape gardening: a landscape artist (the draughtsman), gardeners, an estate manager, garden statuary (in the form of the living statue) a landscape designer and landowners who discuss garden design.

Issues of representation are common to most of Greenaway's work.[442] However, his focus tends to be on the representation of nature in art and the interrelationships of different media. *The Draughtsman's Contract*, I suggest, raises an additional layer of complexity in the representation it offers of women in the garden, albeit not a predominantly visual but a verbal representation. Greenaway has stressed the importance of the dialogue in the film, 'It is extremely important that all the words are heard – not just heard, but listened to…'[443] and it is on the verbal representation of femininity which this chapter will focus. Now regarded by some as a 'period piece', I argue that *The Draughtsman's Contract*, in its emphasis on language, creates an opportunity to expose the ways in which speech continues to embody particular representations of the feminine. Although in a sense this film may be viewed as something of an 'outlier' in the context of this thesis - the focus is on verbal representation and the film is authored and directed by a man - I nevertheless wish to make an argument for the importance of examining the use of language and the implicit bias in those horticultural alignments which are articulated in the film. In 1980 Dale Spender [444] made an impassioned and simple argument for the importance of language for the way in which we structure and understand the world, 'Language is our means of classifying and ordering the world: our means of manipulating reality. In its structure and in its use we bring our world into realization, and if it is inherently inaccurate, then we are misled'.[445] Spender's focus was on the male bias which exists in language and the way in which 'that very language and the conditions for its use in turn structure a patriarchal order'.[446] In Greenaway's film, it is

[442] See Paul Melia and Alan Woods (1998) Peter Greenaway: Artworks 63-98, Manchester University Press, for example. Also, Lawrence, A. (1997) *The Films of Peter Greenaway*, Cambridge University Press.
[443] Lawrence, A. (1997) *The Films of Peter Greenaway,* Cambridge University Press, p.55.
[444] Spender, D. (1981) *Man Made Language*, Routledge and Kegan Paul.
[445] Spender, D. (1981), p.2.
[446] Spender, D. (1981), p.5.

not in the physical space of the garden in which representations of femininity are challenged, but through the use of the horticultural dialogue which is finally appropriated by the women in the film and used to further their own interests.

In this chapter I will make brief reference to the social context of the 1980s, a decade which has received considerable analysis not least from scholars of film who identify it as a key period in the production of British cinema. Here, the garden signifies land and its ownership and who or what is to be excluded. Ideas of landscape and view are a key focus of this chapter and I therefore draw on the work of Labbe in my discussion, as well as referring to Schor and her attention to detail. This chapter differs from others in this thesis in its focus on the use of horticultural language rather than the activity of women in the garden.

4.2 Context and key themes

Directed and written by Peter Greenaway, *The Draughtsman's Contract* was released in 1982. In his commentary to the film, Greenaway articulates the ways in which the film plays upon notions of seeing and knowing, in other words, how images represent the world. Throughout the film there is a correlation between what Mr, Neville sees in his draughtsman's grid and the framing of the camera shot. Greenaway is himself an artist and the alignment between the two instruments creates scenes which acquire the characteristics of a painting. On the BFI website, Josephine Botting notes that 'the director's unique compositional style is heavily based on classical painting'.[447] With a background in art (it is his hand which can be seen making the sketches for the duration of the film), Greenaway himself discusses the painterly aspects of the film, its symmetrical framing and references to Dutch interiors

[447] Botting, J. (2022) Papers, plans, diagrams: the making of The Draughtsman's Contract. BFI website https://www.bfi.org.uk/features/papers-plans-diagrams-making-draughtsmans-contract. Acc. 26.03.2023. See also Lawrence, A. (1997) *The Films of Peter Greenaway,* Cambridge University Press.

and the landscapes of Poussin and Lorraine in the director's Introduction to the film on DVD.[448] Notions of representation are central to the film from Greenaway's own articulation, but also regarding the ways in which the film engages with questions of the representation of landscape and of women.[449]

Set against a country house backdrop, the film, by Greenaway's own admission, 'scrambles together' a mixture of politics, aesthetics and culture where 'a group of aristocrats discuss 'property, money, heredity, continuity'.[450] The theme of property underpins the film, emphasising the connections between landscape, power and aesthetics and to complicate matters, the owner of the property, named Compton Anstey in the film, appears to be dead and is represented only by his clothes which are found in various parts of the garden. The opening sequence introduces the main themes of the film. Mr. Noyes, the estate manager is gossiping about a Mr. Chandos, "who spent more time with his gardener than his wife … They discussed plum trees *ad nauseum".* Women, gardens, the fruits of the garden and the fruits of marriage will underpin the narrative. The ribaldry continues with more discussion of a Mrs. Antrum who has no husband, but does possess a house. Seen from the side, the two men jest, they are apparently both "flat". In conversation with a female guest, Mrs. Pierpoint, when told that she is "not of the company, but part of its property" Mr. Noyes responds that he "would favour you myself" offering her in exchange for her favours "two parterres and a drive of orange trees". The ways in which women are valued is now established. The film emphasises the relationship between power and the ownership of land in its representation, contrasting the draughtsman and the two women who have neither, with

[448] Peter Greenaway, 'Introduction', in The Draughtsman 's Contract DVD (BFI, 2004).
[449] In his PhD thesis, Broughton goes so far as to suggest that Greenaway has created a series of visual puns by, for example, repositioning Sarah Talmann and Mr. Neville in opposition to Mr. and Mrs. Andrews in the Gainsborough portrait, creating an image where Mr. Neville does not assume the dominant position. Mark Edward Broughton, (2008) *Spirits of Place. The English Picturesque in Post-Second World War Audiovisual Narratives.* Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy School of History of Art, Film and Visual Media Birkbeck College, University of London
[450] Peter Greenaway, 'Introduction', in The Draughtsman 's Contract DVD (BFI, 2004).

the remaining company. The association of land, landscape aesthetics and authority are expressed and encapsulated in and through notions of the view.

The film was shot in the house and gardens of Groombridge House in Kent, a location onto which Greenaway felt 'a narrative could be structured'. As discussed in Chapter One, 'one of the most significant production trends in British films of the 1980s was the costume drama',[451] yet few academics regard *The Draughtsman's Contract* as typical of the period.[452] Although the film uses a country estate as its setting, enabling a number of commentaries on the film to describe it as being both a costume drama and murder mystery, the highly stylised nature of the shots and the dialogue mitigate against this interpretation.[453]

While Greenaway draws attention to class and gender relations, Walsh[454] suggests that the film may be seen as socio-political critique, positioned as it is at a strategic period in English government. Walsh sees *The Draughtsman's Contract* as 'a struggle for sexual and social power conditioned by a crisis in symbolic paternity'.[455] Viewed in the context of the 1980s and the government of Margaret Thatcher he argues that, although not overtly a political filmmaker, 'we can see him [Greenaway] as an allegorist, whose features comment indirectly but decisively on the crisis of post-imperial Britain to which Thatcherism also responds'.[456] Walsh's subsequent discussion examines the rise of an agrarian aristocracy and the social strata represented in the film, noting that Mrs. Talmann's comment that "Mr. Neville is a paid servant contracted to my mother", makes the draughtsman's position within the

[451] Higson, A. Re-presenting the National Past: Nostalgia and Pastiche in the Heritage Film in Friedman L. eds (2006) *Fires Were Started. British Cinema and Thatcherism,* Wallflower Press, Great Britain, p.91.
[452] The exception is Walsh, M. Allegories of Thatcherism: Peter Greenaway's Films of the 1980s in Friedman, L.D. ed. (2006) *Fires Were Started. British Cinema and Thatcherism*, Wallflower Press, London and New York.
[453] Paskin, S. Film Reference Forum. http://www.filmreference.com/Films-De-Dr/The-Draughtsman-s-Contract.html. Acc. 25.03.2023
[454] Walsh, M. Allegories of Thatcherism: Peter Greenaway's Films of the 1980s in Friedman, L. ed (2006) *Fires Were Started. British Cinema and Thatcherism*, Wallflower Press.
[455] Walsh, M. (2006) p.284.
[456] Walsh, M. (2006) p.286.

assembled company perfectly clear. *The Draughtsman's Contract,* argues Walsh*,* contains an implied critique of capitalist culture and class structures. While Walsh points to the pivotal role of Mrs. Herbert and Mrs. Talmann, his focus is on the political and artistic aspects of the film, rather than their position as women.

It is the two women who propel the narrative: Mrs. Herbert, the wife of the owner of the estate and Mrs. Talmann, her daughter, who is married to the German Mr. Talmann, but the garden is the subject of the film in the sense that it is the contest over its ownership which directs the plot. The two women, however, are never seen to be active in the garden, this is left to a stream of servants who serve to annoy the draughtsman on the occasions when he sets out to make his drawings. As Greenaway notes, it is the garden and gardening which are the 'sub text' of the film and this is articulated through the verbal exchanges throughout the film. Earlier chapters of this thesis have been concerned with the representation of female activity in the garden, but in exploring the representation of the women in the garden in *The Draughtsman's Contract*, my analysis focusses on the ways in which the female is represented through the dialogue and the ways in which the narrative enables the female characters to undermine conventional aspects of femininity through speech as well as action, presenting an opposition to the conventional analogy between the garden and the female body. Greenaway himself has said that it is, 'a very literary film, the dialogue has been very carefully worked out for puns and conceits'[457] and it is the dialogue and the conceits to which Greenaway refers, on which this chapter concentrates. As I have demonstrated previously, the garden acts as a space where dominant representational narratives of femininity are both mirrored and subverted and Greenaway's 'rich, witty dialogue [which] is brimming with references to history, art, religion and sex'[458] acts as the instrument through which prevailing systems of representation which depend on the figure of the woman in the

[457] Peter Greenaway, 'Introduction', in The Draughtsman 's Contract DVD (BFI, 2004).
[458] *Papers, plans, diagrams: the making of The Draughtsman's Contract,* BFI website, Acc. 27.03.2023.

garden as spectacle are undermined. Using the very same analogies of the garden with which women are identified, the film allows its female characters to expose the contradictions inherent in definitions of femininity.

In his Director's Commentary to the BFI film on DVD, Greenaway remarks that he looked to the work of William Congreve to make the language of the film relevant and characteristic of the period. Restoration Literature, of which Congreve is regarded as one exponent, corresponds roughly to the reign of the Stuarts and encompasses a wide range of divergent styles ranging from John Milton's *Paradise Lost* to William Wycherley's sexual comedy *The Country Wife*. Bonamy Dobrée writes that 'his [Congreve's] people are the men and women who talked in the boudoirs and coffee-houses of King William's reign, and took their exercise in the Park, the Piazza, or the Mall'.[459] Dobrée draws attention to Congreve's use of language and its tendency to unsentimentally, which has led to accusations of heartlessness. It is this inclination towards the unsentimental that is reflected in Greenaway's dialogue as well as the sharpness which typified much of Restoration Comedy. At one point Mr. Neville insults Mr. Talmann by telling him that he "… talk[s] like one who has learnt abroad an archaic way of speaking that became unfashionable in England when my grandfather was a young man'". The dislike each man has of the other is characterised by the spiteful exchanges which take place between Mr. Talmann and Mr. Neville throughout the film. Like the Restoration Comedy on which the film's dialogue is modelled, arch comments are made regarding bodily functions: the plums referred to by Mr. Noyes at the start of the film are gifted to those on the gentleman's estate "until their guts rumbled and their backsides ached from overuse". The comments also draw attention to the central theme of the film, that of the female body: the fruits of ownership and the property which produces them.

[459] Dobree, B. (no date) *Comedies by William Congreve,* Oxford University Press, p. xiii.

4.3 The Plot

The film is set in 1694 following the accession of William of Orange to the English throne and which heralds the 'William and Mary' period. A 'Frenchified' court gives way to one with a more Protestant German/Dutch influence and this is reflected in the antagonism throughout the film between the draughtsman, Mr. Neville, and Mr. Talmann, son-in-law of Mrs. Herbert. Mr. Neville's social class and Catholic sympathies bring him into continual conflict with Louis Talmann, a German Protestant, who hopes to establish his offspring at Compton Anstey. Divisions between Catholic and Protestant, the aristocracy and nouveau riches and between foreignness and Englishness thread though the film. The draughtsman is regarded as rather inadequate and 'Frenchified' and clearly not one of the aristocracy. Mr. Talmann offers a pithy description of the draughtsman: "The man is a pariah, eats like a vagrant and dresses like a barber". Mr. Neville's failure to fit in is reflected in his clothes, 'When everyone wore white the Draughtsman was out of step and wore black. When everyone wore black the Draughtsman wore white, an arrangement to persistently demonstrate the artist being out of step, manoeuvred by the wealthy establishment whose controls were out of reach however hard he tried to learn and catch up'.[460]

As the film progresses it becomes clear that the house, Compton Anstey, and land belonged to Mrs. Herbert's father, but on marriage it became the property of her husband, Mr. Herbert. In the seventeenth century, under English law, unmarried women and widows had the same rights to property, but married women were bound by coverture, which treated a married couple as one economic unit and which granted the husband control over the woman's property and personal assets. In order for Mrs. Herbert to regain any title to the estate, Mr. Herbert needs to be removed. That there is little love, of any kind, between Mr. and Mrs. Herbert is evident from various exchanges throughout the

[460] Peter Greenaway, Summer 2002(extracted from The Draughtsman's Contract BFI Blu-ray booklet)

film and the subordinate position of Mrs. Herbert in relation to her husband is illustrated in his directions as he leaves for Southampton on business. Mr. Herbert gives orders to his wife, “Do not leave my estate and do not drink my claret”. Within this short instruction are set out the ways in which women conventionally feature in the garden. The garden has been seen as a space in which women may be contained and enclosed, which is at one and the same time not a space which is of their own making. In a conversation with Mr. Seymour, Mr. Herbert makes clear his regard for his marriage. “Mr. Neville can charm and impress the wives of rich men … but come with me to Southampton tomorrow, I’ll show you how to impress a lady with a good drawing”.

The plot begins with Mrs. Herbert inviting Mr. Neville to stay at Compton Anstey and to complete a series of drawings of the property which she intends to present as a gift to her husband on his return form Southampton. The draughtsman emphasises his commitments to other clients as Mrs. Herbert tries to persuade him to work for her. “Your terms are exorbitant,” he tells Mrs. Herbert, “so must mine be”. In front of Mr Noyes, who draws up the contract, he adds that for each drawing completed she should “meet Mr. Neville in private and comply with his requests regarding his pleasure”. In return he will complete twelve drawings of the house and grounds with the implication that this gift from wife to husband may save the marriage. The scene is set for a murder to take place and for the hapless Mr. Neville to play his part.

Over the next few days Mr. Neville completes twelve drawings of the house and gardens in varying circumstances and Mr. Herbert mysteriously fails to return home. Talking to Mr. Neville in the garden while he is working on one of his drawings, Sarah Talmann points out to the draughtsman that each drawing features an item of clothing belonging to the missing Mr Herbert which may implicate the draughtsman in the landowner’s disappearance. Registering her superior linguistic skills, Mr. Neville comments, “Madam you are ingenious”. Clearly not above a form of blackmail, she proposes that they, like the draughtsman and her mother, enter into a sexual arrangement “that might protect you and

humour me" she says, and the agreement is once again drawn up by Mr. Noyes. This is a pivotal point in the film, where Mrs. Herbert and Mrs. Talmann now take control.[461] Greenaway has said that he uses 'colour as an organising principle'[462] and this is a point which marks another shift in the film. Mr. Neville, consistently out of step with the others in the house appears dressed in black in the first half of the film and in white in the second half. The colours black and white dominate the film, with emphasis placed on each at different times: in the first half of the film the men and women are dressed predominantly in white, while in the second half - following the shift in authority from the men to the women - they are dressed in black. The only other colour of significance is green, the colour of the gardens around the house and it is these which are the subject under contest: property, money, heredity and continuity are all vested in the landscape.

Mrs. Herbert's daughter, Sarah Talmann, seems to have similarly found herself in a loveless marriage and with no children and the issue of inheritance assumes primary importance, highlighted in one scene where she lies awake next to her snoring husband and slips her hands beneath her nightdress. The extent of Mr. Talmann's impotence is revealed towards the end of the film where, having been accused of adultery, his wife argues with him, "You sound as impotent by day as you are by night", she cries. She claims that his accusations are, "… like your long clean white breeches, but there is nothing of substance in either of them". In the final scenes of the film it becomes clear that Mr. Neville's purpose, rather than provide drawings of the house and its gardens, is to provide an heir to the estate. After a period of absence during which Mr. Herbert's body has been found in the moat surrounding the house and accusations of murder and blackmail circulate, Mr. Neville returns to the estate to produce a thirteenth drawing of the house. As each character jostles to assume power, Mr. Noyes claims that the drawings incriminate Mrs. Herbert, while Mr. Talmann accuses his wife of adultery and argues that this

[461] In the Director's Commentary, Greenaway uses this phrase himself. Peter Greenaway, 'Director's Commentary', in The Draughtsman 's Contract DVD (BFI, 2004).
[462] Peter Greenaway, 'Introduction', in *The Draughtsman* 's *Contract* DVD (BFI, 2004).

is evident in the drawings which Mr. Neville has made. Despite the accusation of adultery, it is also clear that Mr. Talmann will not leave his wife because he will then lose his claim to the estate.

On his return to Compton Anstey it is Mrs. Herbert who suggests "reviving a liaison outside a contract' with Mr. Neville which she hopes 'will fulfil their mutual satisfaction" and is an attractive proposition to the man. In one of the penultimate scenes in the film and one which a partially naked Mrs. Herbert controls absolutely, she reveals that both she and her daughter have used the draughtsman to obtain heirs and that the drawings which were requested have been a subterfuge. Sharing the fruit of a pomegranate with Mr. Neville she draws on its classical allusions to fertility in Greek myth, "And so we try to create an environment in which these fruit will grow" she tells him. The metaphorical association of women with nature and with fruit which has been employed by the men throughout the film is now deployed differently. It is Mrs. Herbert who creates an association between fruit and the male and she plays with the myth of the pomegranate - a gift that Mr. Neville has brought with him. The fruit of the pomegranate is imbued with significance. Historically associated with fertility and female sexuality, there are also some indications that the fruit is associated with male virility. A dialogue rich in symbolic associations and which aligns women with the fecundity of nature throughout the film is now re-appropriated and manipulated by the two women. Following their final sexual encounter, Mrs. Herbert explains to Mr. Neville how the gift from Hades to Persephone of the pomegranate condemned her to spend half of each year underground, an explanation used by the ancient Greeks to account for the changing of the seasons. "A cautionary tale" according to Mr. Neville, who continually fails to recognise his own vulnerability and the risk implicit here.

Both women now claim that the drawings are and have been irrelevant and it is the need for an heir which is paramount. Mr. Neville, regarded as the interloper throughout the film becomes an easy target for accusations of the murder of Mr. Herbert, but has served his purpose. The strutting and arrogant

draughtsman has successfully inseminated the women. 'For what is a man without property' is the comment made at the end of the film as Mr. Neville is blinded and beaten to death by Mr. Noyes, Mr. Talmann and several other of the guests.

4.4 Gardens and the formation of identity

According to Floud there was a marked increase in interest in gardening throughout the seventeenth century as the population of England in general became better off, 'In simple terms, people at the end of the seventeenth century had a bit more money to spend'[463] and as well as the more usual expenditures, historical data shows that an increasing number of people were also spending money on gardening. The period also saw a rapid expansion of the number of seedsmen and nurseries providing plants with hundreds of acres in London alone occupied by nurseries. On his death in 1685 Captain Gurle, for example a specialist nurseryman, left a collection of nectarines, apricots and figs 'valued altogether at £97,750 (£49 10s) … luxuries, to be afforded only by the few'.[464] Ownership of land and the ability to shape it according to one's wishes becomes a prominent aspect of land ownership in the seventeenth century and these concerns and interests are reflected in the film, not only in its representation of the land, but in the ways in which the land is cultivated and the values vested in it. In this sense 'Garden art patronage' becomes according to Rotenberg 'a special case of commodification, the social consumption of material objects'.[465] Like painting and literature the garden is material art and one more commodity through which to demonstrate status. The interest in gardening as it trickled down from the royal family to the aristocracy was represented not only in money spent, but in the discourse surrounding what a garden should look like and what it signified, not only its physical but its symbolic

[463] Floud, R. (2019) *An Economic History of the English Garden*, Penguin, p.17.
[464] Floud, R. (2019), p.18
[465] Rotenberg, R. La Pensée Bourgeoisie in the Biedermeier Garden in Conan, ed (2002) *Bourgeois and Aristocratic Cultural Encounters in Garden Art, 1550 – 1850,* Dumbarton Oaks, p.147. See also Mukerji, C. Reading and writing with nature: a materialist approach to French formal gardens, in Brewer, J. and Porter, R. eds, (1993) *Consumption and the World of Goods,* Routledge.

significance. In Morris' words, 'Garden images have articulated powerful notions of cultural and social identities, of who and what is to be included or excluded'[466] and these articulations are foregrounded in *The Draughtsman's Contract* through the oppositions of Catholic and Protestant, masculine and feminine and the divisions of social class.

At key moments throughout English history, ideals of landscape have been critical to establishing national identity. Drawing together work on a number of countries and continents including Canada and Scotland as well as historical studies such as those on seventeenth century Venice and Georgian England, in *The Iconography of Landscape*, edited by Cosgrove and Daniels,[467] a number of contributors make an extended case for the way in which the landscape has been used to shape national identities. Intrinsic to this is the way in which the landscape is represented visually. In 'The iconography of Nationhood in Canadian Art' Osborne notes that, 'Artists have been major contributors to the development of … national iconographies'.[468] This contribution may be unintentional, or a deliberate act such as the example used by Trevor Pringle[469] in his discussion of Landseer and the Highland Myth. Pringle sets his discussion against the background of widespread disturbances throughout Europe, when, on the occasion of her first visit to Scotland in 1842, Queen Victoria was advised to travel by sea to avoid the unrest in the north of England. Pringle looks at the way in which Landseer used the highland landscape in his paintings, placing the Queen and her retinue in a 'recovered … romantic image of landscape and nature',[470] thus creating a myth of Queen Victoria's 'natural' place in the Highlands and simultaneously eliminating any reference to social tensions.

[466] Morris, M.S. '"Tha'll be like a blush rose when tha' grows up, my little lass": English Cultural and Gendered Identity In 'The Secret Garden', Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 14.1 (1996): 59-78. P.59.
[467] Cosgrove, D. and Daniels, S. eds. (1988) *The Iconography of Landscape,* Cambridge University Press.
[468] Osborne, B. The iconography of nationhood in Canadian art in Cosgrove, D. and Daniels, S. eds. (1988) The Iconography of Landscape, Routledge, p.162.
[469] Pringle, T. R. The privation of history: Landseer, Victoria and the Highland Myth in Denis Cosgrove, D. and Daniels, S. eds. (1988) The Iconography of Landscape, Routledge.
[470] Pringle, T. R. (1988), p.149.

In her book, *The English Garden and National Identity,* Helmreich's[471] focus is similarly on the ways in which identities are shaped through and expressed in the garden, although her study is concerned less with the larger landscape or landscaped estate and more with the smaller enclosed garden of the Arts and Crafts movement. Using a wide range of contemporary material, Helmreich looks at how the debates regarding the principles of garden design were shaped by the desire to establish an English identity at a specific period in time: 1870 to 1914. Drawing on the histories of Jekyll, Robinson, Lutyens and the lesser known Blomfield, she discusses the debate which emerged between these prominent garden designers and theorists, at a time when it was felt that a notion of 'Englishness' needed to be re-established and she argues that 'cultural practices are crucial in defining and shaping national identity'.[472] The squabbles which take place between the characters throughout *The Draughtsman's Contract* would have had particular meaning in 1694.

These perceptions of landscape and gardening styles and their relationship to national and class identity are foregrounded in *The Draughtsman's Contract*. Sarah Talmann tells her husband that her grandfather was an 'army victualler', indicating that the family are *nouveaux riches*. With its Protestant affinities, the family is representative of the landownership which was enabled by the shifts of power from the Catholic Stuarts to the accession of William of Orange to the English throne in 1689 and these, in turn, are to be reflected in an altered landscape design for Compton Anstey. However, the new style of gardening being introduced by the women at the end of the film signifies not only a turning away from the formality of French designs, but also a conclusion to the oppressive domination of Mr. Herbert. Having engineered a situation where the men have lost their authority, Mrs. Herbert and Mrs. Talmann will now enjoy their rights to the property and alter it to suit their tastes, reflecting a new era free of the

[471] Helmreich, A. (2002), *The English Garden and National Identity,* Cambridge University Press.
[472] Helmreich, A. (2002), p.3. Matless (2016) is another writer who has examined the relationship between landscape and Englishness in a later period - 1918 to the 1950s. Matless, D. (2016) *Landscape and Englishness*, Reaktion Books, London.

domination of men. In the second half of the film the two women begin to assert their power, initially through their control of the dialogue and finally through possession of property. The dominant discourse which has represented women in horticultural terms has been destabilised. It is the struggle for possession of the landscaped garden that forms the narrative of the film and in achieving possession of the garden through their use of Mr. Neville to provide heirs, the two women are also re-appropriating the language of femininity, subverting its masculine metaphorical use.

The opposition of Catholic to Protestant is evident throughout the film as William of Orange is pitted against Catholicism in several quarrels, which frequently manifest in horticultural terms. Mr. Talmann comments that the garden at Compton Anstey is becoming "a veritable jungle with influences and introductions from everywhere". Lancelot (Capability) Brown (1716-1783) is credited with being one of the first landscape architects to develop a more English style of gardening, although it was Charles Bridgeman (1690-1736) who was the first to introduce what came to be described as a more naturalistic landscape style and it was Bridgeman who began the shift away from the French formality of parterres and avenues. The garden at Groombridge Place was redesigned in the seventeenth century by Philip Packer with the help of John Evelyn, the diarist and horticulturalist. Onto the landscape Evelyn had structured the garden as a series of 'outdoor rooms' with the typically formal elements considered desirable at the time.[473] One of Mr. Neville's drawings (Fig. 4.2) illustrates the formality of the garden close to the house and which will be altered with the new style influences of the Protestant Dutch king[474] and the Dutch landscape architect, who is introduced by the women towards the end of the film. The importance of the appearance of the garden is highlighted by Botting in her commentary,

[473] The terrace garden and park were created at later dates, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries respectively although both the latter feature in the film.

[474] Floud notes that William and Mary, who had already constructed two large gardens in Holland, continued to develop their estates in England at Kensington House and Hampton Court spending approximately £92 million on their gardening projects. Floud, R. (2019) *An Economic History of the English Garden*, Penguin

'Decorating the garden appropriately also had to be done … with the crew shifting the small number of wooden obelisks and bay trees to different locations throughout the film'. [475]

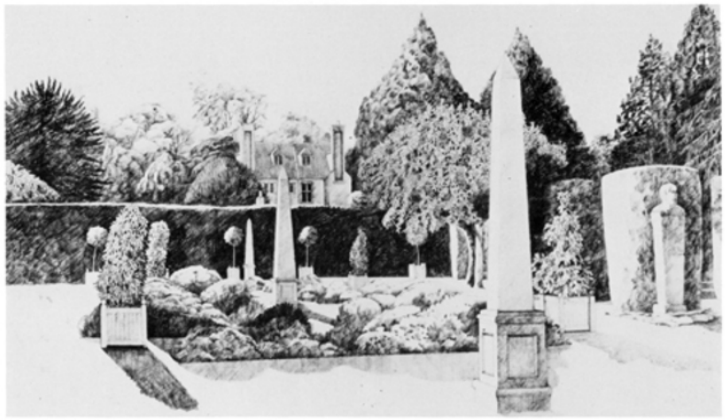

Fig. 4.2
Drawing number #2.
The Draughtsman's Contract (1982) dir. Peter Greenaway
[DVD] BFI.

The garden in the film is thus situated at the cusp of this shift in influences and Mr. Talmann is quite right to point out its diverse influences. Implicit in Mr. Talmann's comment that the garden is 'like a jungle' are references to seventeenth century ideas of the opposition of order and chaos. Political turmoil was evident throughout Europe and fears that England would descend into disorder were manifest. Like nature and political unrest , women were also potentially chaotic and the need to impose order informed political debate. The formality of the garden, the restriction and enclosure of women within its confines and the execution of strict boundaries inform the film until the end, when it is the women who begin to collapse the structures on which order is based.

As Bermingham[476] points out in 'English Landscape Drawing around 1795', political formulations were encoded in landscape design, thus 'the practice of Brown and his followers to clear prospects so as to open views and vistas within the garden … was akin to the levelling tendencies of democratic

[475] *Papers, plans, diagrams: the making of The Draughtsman's Contract,* BFI website, Acc 27.03.2023.
[476] Bermingham, A. English Landscape Drawing around 1795 in Mitchell, W.J.T. (2002) *Landscape and Power*, University of Chicago Press

government'.[477] These tensions are played out in the exchanges between Mr. Neville and Mr. Talmann and Talmann and his wife and the Dutch landscape architect in the film. Set in August 1694, the film is positioned at a time when a nascent Catholicism had been squashed at the Battle of the Boyne. Historically this was a period which introduced a period of stability for England with the accession to the throne in 1689 of the Protestant William III (William of Orange) and his wife Mary, ensuring that a Catholic king would not rule. In his analysis, Bending demonstrates the fierce debates which took place over what might be described as an English style of gardening design, which he concludes, was a result of 'shared assumptions of national interest and narrative history'.[478] The friction between Catholic and Protestant, aristocracy and lower classes is evident throughout the film in the hostilities displayed towards Mr. Neville. At one point, Mrs. Talmann accuses him of 'Scottish sympathies' - yet another reason for discrediting the draughtsman and something else which may contribute to his downfall. In an angry exchange, Mr. Talmann tells Mr. Neville that "The only useful eradication that ever happened in Ireland, Mr. Neville, was performed by William of Orange four years ago …" and when Neville asks Mrs. Herbert why there are no fish in the moat, she responds by saying that "He [Mr. Herbert] doesn't like to see the fish. Carp live too long. They remind him of Catholics".

Towards the end of the film, with Mr. Herbert now disposed of, Mrs. Talmann walks with Mr. Neville and tells him that the garden needs to be 'manicured and cultured' to reflect Dutch (Protestant) influences, while a Dutch landscape architect, van Hoyton,[479] is employed to 'soften the geometry – introduce a new ease' to the garden and make it less French, that is, less Catholic. The change in style also reflects the removal of the final trace of Mr. Herbert, both physically and symbolically.

[477] Bermingham, A. (2002) p. 83.

[478] Bending, S. *Horace Walpole and Eighteenth-Century Garden History* in Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, Vol. 57 (1994), pp. 209-226. P.226. https://www.jstor.org/stable/751470 Acc 17.01.2020

[479] There were no Dutch landscape architects in seventeenth century England, but Greenaway has made no claim to historical accuracy in the making of the film.

4.5 Property

Notions of property and inheritance inform the film and are key to its development and the importance of the ownership of the property is set at the beginning of the film. On first meeting Mr. Neville Mrs. Herbert invites him to, “Come and walk in Mr. Herbert’s garden”, a remark which serves to identify whom the property belongs to and later she tells him that, “Mr. Herbert obtained it [the estate] through marriage to me”. The bluntness in the use of the word ‘obtained’ seems to imply that the marriage was to achieve the ownership of property, rather than for any romantic reason. In a later scene during one of the exchanges of sexual favours which Mr. Neville has insisted on, he asks Mrs. Herbert, “Who will be your husband’s direct heir after you?”. “Not after me” responds Mrs. Herbert, giving yet another clear indication that she no longer has any rights to Compton Anstey and that any inheritance will pass to the next generation. The latter part of the seventeenth century was a period of anxiety about succession to the English throne. In the absence of a legitimate son and heir it was becoming increasingly feared that England would have a Catholic monarch on the throne should Charles II die without legitimate male issue, leaving access clear for Charles’ Catholic brother, James, the Duke of York, who was waiting in France for the opportunity to arise. In an unusual analysis of the relationship between fertility and sexual pleasure in the seventeenth century, Toulalan comes to the conclusion that it is important to understand that in seventeenth-century culture ‘sex is not just sex. It is reproduction, land and inheritance’.[480] Set in 1694 the problematics of inheritance for the Herberts and their estate reflect the concerns of the period. The role of women as producers of heirs is reinforced in the film in a conversation between Mrs. Talmann and Mr. Neville when he is told that Mr. Talmann has taken charge of his nephew, Augustus, on the death of the boy’s father because the mother is a Catholic. Sarah

[480] Toulalan, S. (2006) "The Act of Copulation being Ordain'd by nature as the ground of all Generation": fertility and the representation of sexual pleasure in seventeenth century pornography in England in *Women’s History Review,* Taylor &Francis. Acc 07.04.2023 https://doi.org/10.1080/09612020500530497.

Talmann points out that a child with a Catholic mother is essentially an orphan. This exchange frames the central issue of the film: inheritance, in the words of Mrs. Talmann, 'patrimony, or the lack of it'. The centrality of this patriarchal notion underpins the treatment of women and sets in motion the subsequent action.

In an article for *The Guardian* in 2003 Greenaway writes, 'That year [1694] also saw the introduction of a comparatively minor law that was very significant for women and very significant certainly for this film: the Married Woman's Property Act. This finally meant that women could inherit property and have limited control over inheritance, their own children and certainly property'.[481] The film revolves around these ideas of female and male inheritance. Although these dates have been adopted by other writers, I can find no historical reference to a change in the Married Woman's Property Act in the seventeenth century suggested by Greenaway. In *Patriarchy and Married Women's Property in England: Questions on Some Current Views* Susan Okin examines the legal position of women with regard to property in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and concludes that

> … until significant changes in marriage and property were effected by the Divorce Act and the Married Women's Property Acts in the latter half of the nineteenth century, both the legal structure of marriage and prevailing attitudes about it were such that only in fantasy can we regard eighteenth [or seventeenth] married life as a situation of companionship between equals .[482]

Prevailing laws regarding coverture, which allowed for a wife's fortune to be reserved for her as a separate estate in the hands of trustees were far more likely, Okin argues, to be a guarantee for a father that his money would not be wasted by his son-in-law, rather than enabling women to have a degree of control over their property.

[481] Greenaway, P. (2003) *Murder He Drew*, The Guardian, 1 August.
[482] Okin, S. M. Patriarchy and Married Women's Property in England: Questions on Some Current Views in Eighteenth Century Studies, 1983-1984, Vol 17. No.2 (Winter, 1983-1984), pp 121-138, The Johns Hopkins University Press. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2738280 Acc. 27.03.2023. P.138.

The language of property infuses the dialogue around women. At the start of the film, in a conversation between Mr. Herbert and his daughter, Mrs. Talmann, when she reproaches him for his "indifference" to his wife, she caustically notes where women sit in the hierarchy of interest, "a house, a garden, a horse, a wife". A wife is evidently simply another item of property and of the least importance. The value of land, the importance of owning it and the privileges which this accords the owner are made explicit at the beginning of the film where conversation between the men gathered together indicates that thirteen of those present are there because of a "confidence in one another's money, which is in turn based on owning 'a fair slice of England'". It is the men who are counted and not the women. While flirting with Mrs. Pierpoint at the start of the film, Mr. Noyes is told that he is one of the few who is there on the basis "of merit', that is to "provide ribald gossip", rather than as a result of possession of land. Mr. Neville is clearly another exception and later in the film Mr. Talmann disparagingly refers to the draughtsman as "the son of a tenant farmer". Viewed as 'unconventional', 'imprudent', provocative' and 'impertinent', it is evident that Mr. Neville does not fit in with these guests. The draughtsman's fatal flaw of arrogance prevents him from seeing quite how much of an interloper he is.

4.6 Appreciating the prospect and the view

The nature of the view is central to the film, both as it is constructed in Mr. Neville's drawings and its symbolic significance. Who the view belongs to and by whom it may be viewed or appreciated is fundamental to the film. Like many a Restoration Comedy, the film evidences a continual play on words. Mrs. Herbert refers to the 'possibilities of our landscape' with a suggested reference to the work of Lancelot Brown who viewed landscapes in terms of their potential and hence acquired the nickname 'Capability' when he spoke of 'a landscape's capabilities'. The Brownian style allowed people moving through the landscape to view it as a series of 'prospects', or views, and this became a dominant

feature of landscape aesthetics well into the eighteenth century.[483] At one point in the film, as Mr. Neville is setting up his drawing equipment, Mrs. Herbert says to him that, "It is probably you, Mr Neville that has opened his [Mr Talmann's] eyes to the possibilities of our landscape." This comment is made over a shot of the house, which refers directly back to an earlier image seen through Mr. Neville's viewfinder grid. Of course, here 'the possibilities of landscape' also imply ownership, inheritance, legitimacy and status and the problematics of an heir, the key concerns of the characters in the film.

Alexander Pope (1688-1744) like other writers of the period and later into the eighteenth century, argued that an appreciation of landscape was dependent on a range of factors, but especially on the viewer's social class and gender. Gilpin,[484] another writer with an interest in gardening, in his account of his visit to Stowe gardens in 1748, for example, makes clear that it is not only the design of the view or prospect which is important; equally important are the qualities that the viewer brings to the experience. The variety of viewpoint, the ability to appreciate the view and engage with literary allusions embedded in the landscape were deemed qualities inherent to the educated male intellect.

The idea of 'the view' is, however, problematised by Labbe who points out that, '… the general, abstract point of view belongs to, and indeed is, part of what identifies the educated gentleman; his leisured lifestyle and his occupation as the detached supervisor of his land in contrast with the interested, detailed work of the farmer, artisan, or merchant'.[485] In an examination of the literature, social history and politics of the Romantic period she goes on to argue that this larger view was constructed as male, especially one who was in a position of privilege. The superior position which enabled a view reflected

[483] The work of Capability Brown is not without its critics. See Hoyles (1995). Laing (2024) forcefully makes the point that Brown would move villages to accommodate the wishes of his wealthy clients and herd livestock into groupings by the use of ha-has rather than fences, in order not to spoil the view.
[484] Gilpin, W (1748) *A Dialogue upon the Gardens at Stow in Buckinghamshire*, The Augustan Reprint Society, available at https://www.gutenberg.org/files/39929/39929-h/39929-h.htm. Acc. 04.04.2023. William Gilpin (1724 - 1804) was a writer and clergyman who travelled to view landscapes and set down his ideas in notebooks which had a circulation which included Horace Walpole and King George III.
[485] Labbe, J.M. (1998) *Romantic Visualities. Landscape, Gender and Romanticism*, Macmillan Press Ltd. P.10. Although Labbe's discussion concentrates on the Romantic period I suggest that these ideas were already in circulation prior to the eighteenth century.

superior power - one did not have a prospect to survey unless one had wealth and status. 'In other words, he who achieves a certain height of observation is able, because of his enlarged view, to command both a larger landscape and the respect of others'.[486] This tradition, she argues, identifies women and the lower classes as unable to appreciate a view. Writers of the period, comments Labbe, 'continually ally the sublime with height, uniformity and the mind',[487] qualities which were perceived to be lacking in women and the lower classes, thus excluding the draughtsman and Mrs. Neville and Mrs. Tallman.

Labbe's discussion of the prospect view encompasses ideas of entitlement and achievement. It is the masculine view which is entitled and legitimized, it is both rational and objective, whereas the feminine is a 'disenfranchised perspective'[488] restricted and narrow, suited to the confines of the enclosure. Although Labbe does not refer to the work of cultural geographers, she too sees space as gendered; certain spaces she argues 'function … to enclose the feminine into an unambitious, conventional, reassuringly docile sphere'.[489] Focussing on the work of William Wordsworth, she illustrates the way in which he 'locates the detail and the landscape-bound body in his sister, mapping onto the feminine a visuality he associates with immaturity and the "language of the sense"'.[490] It is the senses, or emotions, which are characterised as female, which occlude objectivity and a rational approach, those characteristics associated with the masculine. The association of the feminine with detail and the quotidian may 'simultaneously drain a man' negating 'the possibility of the prospect view'.

> Visuality – the way one looks – is a power ineluctably linked both to the *physical* body whose eyes broadly survey, or minutely detail, the surrounding prospect, and to the *social* body, and the representations thereof, that provide the gendered body with its distinctions.[491]

[486] Labbe, J.M. (1998), p.ix.
[487] Labbe, J.M. (1998), p.40.
[488] Labbe, J.M. (1998), p.xiii.
[489] Labbe, J.M. (1998), p.xv
[490] Labbe, J.M. (1998), p.xvii.
[491] Labbe, J.M. (1998), p.xxii.

These notions of the view are also at play in *The Draughtsman's Contract*. As a draughtsman Mr. Neville tries to impose a rigid structure on the landscape through his viewfinder[492] and is determined that he shall paint what he sees and that his drawings will be an objective and rational record of the house and its grounds. At the start of the film, the draughtsman can be heard creating a schedule for each day's work, to the extent that Mr. Talmann suggests that he is organising his work as though it were a military campaign. The gardens are to be cleared of intrusive figures and animals, only "Such animals as are presently grazing in the fields will be permitted to do so". However, it is evident throughout the film that the land(scape), like the women with which it is aligned, resists definition and the imposition of order and that the view, in its proper classes and masculine sense, is something which Mr. Neville struggles to achieve. There is a continual slippage as sheep intrude into Mr. Neville's view, laundry is left to dry on shrubs, servants or gardeners need to be chased away and a ladder is found where it should not be. This constant displacement has implications for the view. Rather than the prospect view of the landscape, Mr. Neville's viewfinder locates the quotidian, the aspects of daily life which are the domain of women and the lower classes. Mr. Neville struggles to represent the prospect view perhaps because he lacks the wealth and status necessary to do so and consistently displays an inability to read the implications or possibilities of the plot in which he has become embroiled. As he states that landscape is one of his prime interests, it is reasonable to assume that Greenaway will have been familiar with the idea of the prospect view and all that it implies. In addition to the play on the camera frame and point of view, I suggest the film also plays with this notion of a gendered prospect view and the idea of landscape possibilities.

[492] The camera is also aligned with these views, framing them as Mr. Neville sees them. In the film, 'the frame' has a multiplicity of meanings. In his comments in *The Draughtsman's Contract* BFI Blu-ray booklet Greenaway states that, 'It's a story about a 'frame-up' both in metaphor and for real'. Broughton develops the idea of framing the draughtsman in his thesis, *Spirits of Place: The English Picturesque in Post-Second World War Audio Visual Narratives*. Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Birkbeck College, University of London. September 2008.

Like Labbe, Schor explores the relationship between aesthetics and dominant misogynistic discourses. In her work she argues that, historically, detail and ornament have been allied with a 'superfluity of object'.[493] Christopher Wren, for example, viewed the palace at Versailles as overdecorated, a characteristic which distinguished it from what was regarded as a more 'masculine' English style of the time.[494] The attempt to define Englishness can be seen in the opposition to decoration and detail and a move towards a less ornamental style. The draughtsman himself is regarded as 'dandified', and 'Frenchified' emphasising his otherness and another derogatory reference to his inferior position among the guests in the house. The ideas of decoration and ornament, the details of design, find their reflection in the perceived affinity of women and the miniature. Schor identifies a number of writers who identified 'a relationship between woman's cultural inferiority and her physiological constitution, mak[ing] explicit the process by which woman's incapacity to transcend particularity is naturalised'.[495] She uses the words of the philosopher Burke to illustrate how the 'detail has been traditionally connoted as feminine and devalorized … "As man considers the species and general things, woman fastens on the individual and settles on particular objects"'.[496] Labbe and Schor both point to a political structure that endorses the prospect viewpoint - whether that viewpoint may be achieved is dependent on one's class and gender. The ability to appreciate the view is thus significant for both the women in the film and the draughtsman. However, in *The Draughtsman's Contract*, it may be argued that it is the women who have the larger view and can see the possibilities of the landscape, in its broadest sense, subverting notions of particularity and femininity. Both Mrs. Herbert and Mrs. Talmann have demonstrated that they are able to grasp the abstract; at one point Mrs. Talmann tells the draughtsman that her mother is "not incapable of a few stratagems". By contrast, it is Mr. Neville who is caught up in

[493] Schor, N. (2007) p.4.
[494] Although built a century later (1747), Brown also makes the point about Horace Walpole's Gothic creation – a style considered effeminate - at Strawberry Hill that 'Walpole was in revolt against the beefier elements of England …. and it is perfectly possible to discern … elements of camp disaffection' (Brown, J. 2000, *The Pursuit of Paradise. A Social History of Garden and Gardening,* Harper Collins Publishers, p.115).
[495] Schor, N. (2007) p.3.
[496] Schor, N. (2007) p.15.

the daily recording of particularities. Whereas the landscape garden figures as a masculine space and is associated with the public sphere and political influence, the film represents the two women harnessing the space of the formal landscaped garden, metaphorically and physically, for their own purposes.

4.7 The language of horticulture

Daniels has observed that, 'Gardens have been represented as female and women and girls have been imagined as flowers and gardens - as objects of an often penetrating masculine heterosexual desire of gaze'.[497] Similarly, Mitchell and Oakley note that, 'Material and symbolic gardens, especially in the hortus conclusus or enclosed garden, have long been associated with female bodies and, in particular, with female heterosexuality in Western culture'.[498] In her essay, Fabricant describes how 'the political terminology frequently employed in contemporary treatises on landscape gardening possesses more than metaphorical significance and comes to assume very special nuances when understood in the light of the assumed sexuality of the land'.[499] Although Fabricant's focus is on the eighteenth century and the ideology of Augustan landscape design, there are clear overlaps with the themes of *The Draughtsman's Contract.* Fabricant illustrates how, writing for *The Spectator*, Joseph Addison (1672 – 1719) for example, portrays 'women in terms similar to the ones used for depicting gardens'.[500] Although Pope began publishing his writing in 1711, the subjects to which he continually returns will have been in circulation long before. In the first scene in which their sexual liaison takes place, Mr. Neville's clinical assessment of Mrs. Herbert's body in terms of pears reflects contemporary alignments of the female body with nature, the land and its fruits. Holding her arms to one side and examining her naked body, he comments, "The angle between the branches and the main trunk is too steep. But the

[497] Stephen Daniels 'Love and Death across an English Garden: Constable's Paintings of His Family's Flower and Kitchen Gardens', in The Huntingdon Library Quarterly, 1992 Vol 55 issue 3 pages 433-458.
[498] Mitchell, J. and Oakley, A. (1977) *The Rights and Wrongs of Women* Pelican Books, p 71
[499] Fabricant, C. (1979), p.110.
[500] Fabricant, C. (1979), p.116.

original work is good and what of the pears themselves? Are they presentable?" Fabricant's discussion of the ways in which the Augustan landscape was viewed by poets and artists is relevant to an analysis of *The Draughtsman's Contract*. 'Both women and landscape were continually being judged for their ability to titillate the imagination and satisfy the senses …'.[501] At dinner one evening, Mr. Neville remarks that he is 'enjoying the maturing delights of her [Mrs. Herbert's] country garden … where there is much to be surprised at and applauded'. He goes on, 'I am permitted to take my pleasure on her property without hindrance'. The ownership and conquest of the land, uniquely male activities, find their expression in the film in descriptions of women and land and the fruits of that land as interchangeable. Like the women, the garden needs to be 'manicured and cultured'. In a conversation over lunch with Mr. Noyes, the estate manager and once suitor to Mrs. Herbert, Mr. Neville is told that he should seek an 'understanding of the garden', with the implication that 'the garden' is Mrs. Herbert. From the end of the seventeenth century onwards, the landscape, or nature, has been consistently worked on and 'improved'. In the eighteenth century Humphrey Repton used the idea of a 'garden's improvement'[502] when working for a client. The identification of women with nature and the land was reinforced in the developing sciences and Fabricant notes that botany displayed a singularly 'gynaecological spirit of inquiry' exposing 'the female' parts of plants to scrutiny.[503] Although created some years later than Groombridge Place / Compton Anstey, the garden at Stowe established in 1717 by Lord Cobham, demonstrated that the physical garden itself could also contain representations of female sexuality and included a large number of erotic features, from the Mound of Venus to the Temple of Venus with its paintings of naked women and seduction by satyrs. Articulated by the men in the film, the verbal exchanges consistently position women only in terms of their bodies, describing women in terms which align them with land which is to be possessed and cultivated and turned to their advantage.

[501] Fabricant, C. (1979), p.111.
[502] See Repton's 'Red Books' for examples.
[503] Fabricant, C. (1979), p.110.

Definitions of landscape as neutral have enabled it to be the subject of domination and conquest, but cultural and urban feminist geographers, for example, have argued that the environment is rarely neutral and that a conventional relationship exists between space, gender and hierarchy. Pugh, like others, points out that, 'The 'natural' is the cultural meaning read into nature, meaning determined by those with the power and the money to use nature instrumentally'[504] going on to argue that what is deemed to be 'natural' is actually used to legitimate the status quo. This alignment of women with the natural, what Gates describes as the 'feminization of nature and the naturalization of women'[505] enables ideas of domination: women, like nature, are there to be subjugated to the will of the male; women and land alike need to be cultivated. The categories of 'women' and 'nature' become fused in opposition to 'men' and 'rationality'. In contradiction to perceived feminine qualities of passivity, dependence and restraint, the film reveals that Mrs. Talmann and Mrs. Herbert are both very capable of rational thought and debate and act as agents for their own future. In the two women 'femininity' and 'nature' have become detached. In the final seduction scene Mr. Neville repeats a sentence which he had spoken to Mrs. Talmann earlier in the film when she pointed out to him the implications of the scattered items of Mr. Herbert's wardrobe, "Madam, that was ingenious". However, by this point his realisation has come too late. Mrs. Talmann has already told him that, "Perhaps you have taken a good deal on trust" and it becomes clear that both his arrogance and his innocence have been taken advantage of. The landscape of Compton Anstey which forms the background to the drawings, is far from being simply natural or neutral. Mr. Neville's mistake is to fail to "read" the landscape in which he finds himself: limiting himself to what he can see in his viewing frame, to formal composition and to the formal terms of his contract, he fails to understand the relations of patronage and inheritance that are vested in the landscape and is too arrogant to see his own position in this. This notion of landscape as something to be "read" becomes abundantly clear after Mr. Herbert's death, when the various members

[504] Pugh, S. (1988) *Garden, Nature, Language*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, p.2.
[505] Gates, B. *Kindred Nature* (1998), University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, p.3.

of the household scrutinise Mr. Neville's drawings for clues to the identity of the murderer of Mr. Herbert.

4.8 Conclusion

From Mrs. Herbert's initial comments to Mr. Neville, the language of horticulture and the alignment of women with the garden informs the film, determining the narrative structure and the position of the characters. Greenaway's language not only captures some of the dialogue which would have been characteristic of the period, but also its metaphorical association of women with land and nature. What is also successfully demonstrated is the possibility that the language itself may be re-appropriated by those against whom it is used and effectively deployed to challenge patriarchal structures. I have explored the metaphorical alignment of the female and the garden to expose what I have described as the fallacy of femininity, revealing the garden as a space where meaning can be made and un-made. Unlike the other chapters in this thesis, this one has focussed exclusively on the representation of women through the use of language and has explored how that language may be used both to support conventional definitions of femininity but also, through Greenaway's use of what he calls 'conceits' and 'sub-texts', to undermine those conventions.

Mitchell's comment that, 'landscape circulates as a medium of exchange, a site of visual appropriation, [and] a focus for the formation of identity'[506] is evident in the ways in which gardens and gardening books from the seventeenth century onwards provided a means of expressing political views, both physically and symbolically. Both *The Assam Garden* and The *Draughtsman's Contract* point to the use of the garden as a repository of values, what Mitchell refers to as a 'body of cultural and economic practices'[507] which range from the demonstration of wealth and power to the inscription of what it

[506] Mitchell, W.T. ed. (2002) *Landscape and Power*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, p.2.
[507] Mitchell, W.T. ed. (2002), p.2.

means to be defined as feminine. My analysis makes visible the political and ideological positions embedded in the represented garden. In The *Draughtsman's Contract* it is the women who resist ideological constructions through their re-articulation of horticultural dialogue.

Chapter Five. 'The Assam Garden'.

Fig.5.1
Frontispiece from *A Gloucestershire wild garden with some extraneous matter,* by the Curator [Henry Cook]. Royal College of Physicians. In copyright.
Available at:
https://wellcomecollection.org/works/eut8dn7b (Acc. 07.08.2022)

5.1 Introduction

In the film *The Assam Garden,* directed by Mary McMurray (1985), questions of power, displacement, memory and femininity are opened up in the use of the garden as a narrative space. Like the other texts selected for this study the garden and horticultural concerns here are an integral part of the narrative. The film highlights the contradictory nature of the female figure in the garden, with its implications of both freedom and oppression, but also points to class-based and colonial power

relations. The garden here is open to a polysemic reading, drawing on notions of identity, enclosure and control, exclusion and retreat and it is through the garden that these ideas are explored. My reading of the film suggests that the garden offers a space where female identity may be explored and alternative representations of femininity may be developed.

This chapter concentrates on the representation of gardens in film and the significance of the space of the garden in enabling classed, racial and gendered boundaries to be (re)negotiated. My analysis will consider not only the gendered implications of gardens and gardening, but also the ways in which the exotic planting and the introduction of neighbours from India make explicit the colonial history contained in the English garden. The garden space here is complex, dissected and traversed by gender and class as well as race. My focus in this chapter is on the representation of the women in the garden and I have therefore not engaged with a detailed analysis of the colonial implications of the Assam garden, which have been ably addressed elsewhere by Brydon.[508]

Drawing on feminist film theorists such as Doane, de Lauretis, Mulvey and Modelski[509] I argue that *The Assam Garden* transgresses dominant narrative codes both in the narrative structure itself and in its representation of the female figure. Feminist film theory suggests that in a true feminist cinema it is not only that the gender of the protagonist, or 'hero' which has to change, but also the way in which the narrative is structured, in other words the female protagonist must also be the subject of the actions or events of the film. Questions of space, gender and colonialisation also form points of analysis and I use

[508] Brydon, L. (2014) Navigations and Negotiations: Examining the (Post)Colonial Landscape of The Assam Garden, Journal of British Cinema and Television, 11 (2-3) pp 172-188.
[509] Doane, M.A. (1984) "The Woman's Film": Possession and Address, in Doane, M.A., Mellencamp, P. and Williams, L. eds. *Re-Vision: Essays in Film Criticism*, Los Angeles: AFI; De Lauretis, T. (1984*) Alice Doesn't*, Indiana University Press. Bloomington; Mulvey, L. (1989) *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Macmillan; Modelski, T. (1999) *Old Wives' Tales. Feminist Re-Visions of Film and Other Fictions*, I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd. New York.

the critiques offered by hooks and Said[510] to make visible conventional horticultural associations and to demonstrate how these may be opened up to questioning.

In using film as the basis for analysis, this chapter explicitly addresses those issues raised by feminist cultural geographers in their questioning of definitions of space, drawing on the work of Rose, Massey and McDowell.[511] In the film, both women quite literally 'move out of their place'[512] challenging the boundaries created by race, class and gender. My reading of *The Assam Garden* suggests that the space of the garden, as neither entirely private nor entirely public, provides a space, neither margin nor centre, in which Helen and Ruxmani are freed from dominant discourses of gender, class and race and eventually develop their own sense of self; in working together in the garden, the relationship between Ruxmani and Helen also succeeds in affirming and creating a degree of commonality between the two women, while at the same time recognising their classed and racial differences and histories.

5.2 Synopsis and context

The Assam Garden was one of Deborah Kerr's[513] final films and despite its significant credentials, it has not been widely available and has been the subject of even less analysis. Over the period from 1979 to 2006, the film's director, Mary McMurray, had a prolific career in television, directing series from *Taggart* and *Coronation Street* to *The Bill.* She won Best First Film Award at the Sanremo Film Festival for *The Assam Garden* and was described by Bill Baxter in *Film and Filming* as 'One of the most

[510] hooks, b. (2015) *Feminism is for Everybody*, Routledge, London; Said, E. W. (1994) *Culture Imperialism,* Vintage, London.
[511] Rose, G. (1993) *Feminism and Geography. The limits of geographical knowledge*, Polity Press; Massey, D. (1994) *Space, Place and Gender*, Polity Press; McDowell, L (1999) *Gender, Identity and Place. Understanding Feminist Geographies*, Polity Press
[512] hooks, b. (2015) p.148.
[513] For readers not familiar with Deborah Kerr (1921-2007) she was a major award -winning actor in her lifetime, starring in iconic films such as *From Here to Eternity* (1953), and *The King and I* (1956) and was awarded an Honorary Oscar in 1994.

remarkable directing debuts in post-war British cinema'.[514] Nevertheless, *The Assam Garden* was to be her only venture into directing for the cinema screen. The screenwriter, Elizabeth Bond, also did not pursue a career in film but went on to become a visual artist. Although it was featured at film festivals and initially screened on Channel Four in 1987, the film had limited release and, perhaps because of this, has attracted little attention.

The Assam Garden is, as its name suggests, a film about a garden. Unusually for a film, the garden takes centre stage. Set in the 1980s, contemporary anxieties are foregrounded and the film captures many of the changes taking place at the time: the feelings of people who have settled in England and had children who have grown up with different values; the place of women in the family and society; changing social trends such as the development of supermarkets and the decline of more personal service. Fear about immigrants and employment are also reflected in the conversations which Helen has with her neighbour, Ruxmani. According to Hill, 'A key aspect of the cinema's response [in the 1980s] … was its exploration of questions of 'identity''[515] and, in this respect, *The Assam Garden* reflects and refracts these issues. In contrast to many films of the 1980s, which used the grittiness of the urban environment to explore questions of identity, where the *The Assam Garden* diverges from its contemporaries is that it uses the garden as a space in which these questions and insecurities are opened up to investigation.

The opening sequences of the film show a 'villa' house, with a drive sweeping up to the main entrance, which is covered with various climbing plants and surrounded by shrubs, in essence a traditional English country garden. The film begins by tracing Helen's quiet and solitary journey home from her husband's funeral through the countryside to her arrival at their home. The significance of the house

[514] Cited in Brydon, L. (2014) Navigations and Negotiations: Examining the (Post)Colonial Landscape of The Assam Garden. *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 11 (2-3) pp 172-188, page 5. Accessed 17 March 2022.
[515] Hill, J. (1999) *British Cinema in the 1980s,* Oxford University Press, p.xii.

and garden are signalled by the change in camera angle. Throughout the car journey the camera rests on Helen and the interior of the car and her point of view as she watches the countryside through the car window. At the end of the journey the camera moves to offer a dramatic view of the house and the gardens it sits in setting the scene for the remainder of the film. The garden is not only to feature in the title of the film, but will be the subject.

The garden to the rear of the house, where the main activity of the film takes place, is shown in several aspects. Typical English cottage garden border plants feature in one area of the garden, which is characterised by herbaceous borders and lawns and here there is a degree of terracing as the land slopes away from the house. The other key part of the garden, which Ruxmani refers to as an 'Indian garden', has a sunken aspect and is approached by a series of steps. It is this area which gives the film its title: *The Assam Garden*. This includes the exotic plants that have originated in warmer and more tropical parts of the world and contains large banana plants, huge leaved gunneras, spiky cordylines, rheums, phormiums, yuccas, fatsias, daturas and bamboos. This is the garden which Helen describes to Ruxmani as 'The Sahib's pride and joy', a space which is gendered male not only because it is Arthur's creation, but the planting is presented as aggressive and overbearing, designed by her husband in memory of their time spent in India when he enjoyed a position of importance and imperial rule dominated. At the beginning of the film Helen is shown struggling to manage the spiny cordylines and yuccas and the huge musas, often struggling to find her way through the overgrowth (Fig. 5.2). The garden here is represented as an environment in which Helen is not comfortable.

Fig. 5.2
Helen in the exotic Assam garden, created by her husband.
Dir. Mary McMurray *The Assam Garden,* (1985)

The Assam Garden centres around the role of Helen Graham, played by Deborah Kerr, recently widowed, and her attempt to bring back to its intended state the garden created by her late husband on their return from India, where they had managed a tea plantation. The location for the film is Priors Mesne, near Aylburton, four miles south of Lydney in the Forest of Dean. According to website movie-locations.com,[516] a range of locations had been investigated to find an appropriate exotic garden, suitable to carry the narrative of the film. The two acre garden at Priors Mesne which was selected had originally been created in the 1800s by Henry Cook, an ex- British officer in India, on his return to England, tracing a similar trajectory of memory and nostalgia as the film itself. [517]

In the film, shortly following her husband's death, Helen opens a letter addressed to him which confirms that the garden he created may be selected for inclusion in a journal, "a new edition of 'Great British Gardens'", which is likely to become "a collector's item". However, in order to qualify for this inclusion, the garden is to be the subject of an inspection visit by one of the Great British Gardens team. What

[516] Website movie-locations.com[516] [accessed 11 May 2017]
[517] Using his own book, *A Gloucestershire Wild Garden* as a guide to dates, the garden was probably created between 1885 and 1902. Henry Cook's book was first published in 1899.

follows in the film is the activity involved in meeting the expectations of this visit, which Helen initially undertakes in her husband's memory.

Help in renovating the garden comes unexpectedly from an Indian woman, Ruxmani Lal, who lives with her sick husband on a nearby housing estate. The film traces the development of a friendship between the two women, one which alludes to their time spent in India, one as a child and the other as the wife of a manager of a tea plantation, revealing the sense of displacement felt by both women. The developing friendship includes the children and grandchildren of the Indian couple and the intimacy of this small family is in stark contrast to Helen's isolation. However, the film makes no attempt to draw overly simplistic conclusions about either the family or of Helen's relationship with them. Ruxmani (played by Madhur Jaffrey) is shown to be quite capable of a degree of duplicity as she manipulates Helen into a position of persuading her ailing husband to return to India. Helen's increasing reliance on Ruxmani becomes evident in the film, not only in terms of help in the garden, but as an antidote to her loneliness.

A French graduate, Helen fills her time in India with teaching one of the bearer's children French. In her conversations with her neighbour, Helen indicates that there was a degree of estrangement between herself and her husband. Questioned by her neighbour, Ruxmani, as to why there are no children in the family, Helen describes a marriage that seems to have become empty (sexually at least) quite quickly. 'We didn't have much of a sex life, I suppose', she says. Arthur had apparently 'lost interest after a couple of years'. Pressed by Ruxmani as to why this was the case, Helen suggests that she was probably quite attractive as a young woman and she goes on to describe how she would dress for dinner, 'jolly him along and whisper sweet nothings and tease him'. She admits that this was 'pathetic really'. Here again there is an unspoken suggestion that Arthur's interests lay elsewhere.

Throughout the film past and present are juxtaposed, with the past sometimes confusing the present. When James Philpott, the representative from Great British Gardens visits Helen towards the end of the film, learning of her background, he uses several Urdu phrases when speaking to her. Helen points out that she only ever learned a little Hindustani. Before her marriage, Helen studied French at university and it is this language which she taught the bearer's son while she and her husband lived in India. On meeting Ruxmani's grandchildren, Helen speaks to them in French, and, towards the end of the film, Helen is shown rushing out into the garden calling, "Arthur! Viens ici! J'ai quelque chose important a dire!" This moment confirms Arthur's complete absence from the garden and Helen's ownership of the space and her newly defined sense of self.

Helen's husband makes very few appearances in the film, but he remains a clear and controlling presence throughout, and here there are echoes of von Arnim's Man of Wrath. That Arthur is never revealed clearly in the film may be partly to do with Helen's recollection of him and raises the question of whether she really knew him, but it may also reflect Helen's relationship to the man – in flashbacks she observes him from the side, never quite close to him and always at a distance. Apart from the moments when Helen lapses into her memories of him, watching him walking through the garden, she also has brief 'conversations' with him although in these instances Arthur remains hidden.
On one occasion, when talking to Ruxmani, Helen reveals that as she grew increasingly homesick, she issued her husband an ultimatum: either they return to England or the marriage would be over.[518] The garden thus becomes Arthur's project, undertaken in memory of their time in India, embarked on perhaps because of their return. In India Arthur was a tea planter and he and Helen enjoyed a life with servants and some authority. Describing their time in India, Helen says of Arthur, "He had a way with people. The servants loved him". Once again implied, but not articulated, is the idea that perhaps

[518] It is worth noting that the Indian Independence Act was passed in 1947, which meant the end of the British empire. Although not referred to in the film, this would have precipitated the return to Britain of many people in the Graham's position.

Helen and her husband may have become estranged because he had relationships with other women. Certainly, views of Arthur strolling in the garden accompanied by a group of laughing, chattering Indian women demonstrate a man very at ease in their company (Fig.5.3). For Arthur, the time spent in India is one marked by popularity and authority, but for Helen it is a period of purposelessness. Talking to Ruxmani about her past, Helen tells her that she was a graduate, "I wanted to teach, but nothing came of it,' she says and goes on to describe how, one by one, she and her fellow women graduates got married and gave up their ideas of a career. In India she befriends the bearer's son, Mohammed Yussuf, and begins to teach him French. It was a way, Helen says, of 'pass[ing] rather a lot of time'. The tone of voice and use of words in this statement give a clear indication of the emptiness of her days. According to Elisabeth Bond, the scriptwriter, being 'only a wife' that is, someone without a career, a woman's experience of India would have been limited and restricting.[519] Bond's own family history can be traced through both India and what was then, Ceylon. Her mother worked as a surgeon in Ceylon and her father was a plant pathologist, while her aunt worked as a surgeon in India and Bond is very clear on how purposeless colonial life without work would be for women. Helen's memories also give no indication that she participated in the general activities of colonial wives and clearly did not enjoy living there, making references to the 'unbearable heat' and 'poor sanitation'. In conversation, Bond has stated her own commitment to feminism and remarked that 'if you are a woman you understand it [how life for women] can be limiting', a frustration which is evident in Helen's comments.

[519] In conversation with Elisabeth Bond, 5 December 2022.

Fig. 5.3.
Arthur strolling in relaxed manner around his garden in India, accompanied by women.
Dir. Mary McMurray *The Assam Garden,* (1985)

On his return to England Helen indicates that Arthur struggled to find employment: she comments that he managed to find work at Liptons. The disparity between work at Liptons and his work as the manager of a tea plantation in India could not be greater, the only link between the two is that both employments were connected to the production and supply of tea. At one point in the film, in conversation with Ruxmani, Helen tells her that they had many servants who carried out all the tasks for them in India, including maintaining the garden there. But, Helen explains to Ruxmani, 'This was different, he would have none of it. This garden was to be all our own work'. The loss of the control and position which Arthur held in India is compensated for by the Assam garden. In creating the Assam garden Arthur can once again exercise his authorship, as well as create a memorial to the life he has lost. Arthur's loss of authority is offset by the control he exercises in bringing the exotic garden to life, evident even after his death. At one point in the film Helen mutters to herself, "Got that under control. Yes, Arthur, yes", as though she can hear him chivvying her along to complete work. The list of garden tasks which Helen is seen ticking off as they are completed also show an engagement with her dead

husband as she mutters, “done that Arthur”. For Arthur the garden symbolises domination and control and an attempt by a displaced imperialist to recover what has been lost.

5.3 Power relations

Helen’s house and garden are set apart from the nearby village, not only in their distance, but in their form. The estate where Ruxmani and her husband live is distinctive in its lack of garden and gardened space. The houses and bungalows are shown with lawned areas to the front, but little else. In contrast, the Assam garden itself is overflowing with shrubs and plants, demonstrating its separateness from the people who live on the estate. Created on their return from India, the garden manifests the colonial reach of the plant trade and the substantial property would most likely have been acquired using the money that the Graham’s had accumulated during their life in India.[520]

In conversation, Helen tells Ruxmani that she and her husband returned to England in 1950, where he wanted a large property on which he could create his Indian garden. Both Brydon[521] and Dalziell point to the colonial implications of the use of the garden in film and what Dalziell terms the ‘politics of space’.[522] She notes that colonised land has been seen as ‘empty’ and therefore suitable for settlement and, in film, this is the task of the male hero who moves through the space. For Dalziell ‘garden making … carried out … the work of colonialism’.[523] Brigham writes in a similar vein, ‘The development of

[520] Mukerji, for example, examines French gardens and notes the multiple purposes of the garden from rare imported plants which evidence the economic reach of capitalist trading, to the demonstration of a classical heritage through statuary, and social claims to status via the designed garden which demonstrated the exercise of power over nature. Chandra Mukerji, Reading and writing with nature: a materialist approach to French formal gardens, in Brewer, J. and Porter, R. eds, *Consumption and the World of Goods,* Routledge, 1993. The colonial legacy of English gardens is also explored in Hoyles, M. (1991) *The Story of Gardening*, Journeyman Press and Brydon, L. (2014) Navigations and Negotiations: Examining the (Post)Colonial Landscape of The Assam Garden, *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 11 (22-£). pp172-188. My focus is on the representation of femininity in the garden and I will only briefly discuss the garden in the context of colonialism, which merits focus as an independent study.

[521] Brydon, L. (2014)

[522] Dalziell, T. (2009) Gunpowder and gardens: reading women in ‘The Proposition’. In *Studies in Australian Cinema* 2009 Vol 3 Issue 1, p. 3.

[523] Dalziell, T. (2009) p.5.

botany and gardening … correlates directly to the development of colonialization and trading companies. Sometimes the plants became commodities, but the collecting of exotics also conveyed symbolically the breadth of one's financial or political power'.[524] In his study of English literature, Said notes that, 'Nearly everywhere in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British and French culture we find allusions to the facts of empire', which he calls, 'a structure of attitude and reference'.[525] Nevertheless, it remains only 'marginally visible'. 'Imperial possessions are … usefully *there* …their existence always counts'.[526] Much the same might be written about the English garden. Accounts of gardens referred to throughout this thesis, although alluding to plant collectors and the origins of many plants which have found their way into English gardens, rarely suggest the colonial territories or circumstances in which they have been found.

The yuccas, which can be seen prominently in Helen Allingham's painting of Gertrude Jekyll's garden at Munstead Wood (Fig. 5.4), for example, would have been brought from the Caribbean despite their appearance in gardens which championed an "English cottage garden' style of planting, a horticultural demonstration of the 'usefully there' referred to by Said. *Camellia reticulata* and *Wisteria sinensii, both still popular in contemporary English gardens, were imported* by John Reeves (1774-1856), an inspector of the East India Company, itself involved with colonial exploitation. British plant collecting from the Far East reached its peak in the nineteenth century and the journals of Jane Loudon are witness to the number of new introductions which she lists in the pages of each issue.

[524] Brigham, D. Mark Catesby and the Patronage of Natural History in the First Half of the Eighteenth Century in Meyers, A and Pritchard, M.B. eds (1998) *Empire's Nature: Mark Catesby's New World Vision,* University of North Carolina Press, p. 97.
[525] Said, E. W. (1994) *Culture Imperialism*, Vintage, p.73.
[526] Said, E. W. (1994) p.75.

Fig. 5.4
Allingham, H. (1900-1903) *South Border at Munstead Wood*
Available at:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Helen_Allingham_-_A_Herbaceous_Border.jpg
Helen Allingham (1848 - 1926), Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.
(Acc. 6 July 2022)

These historical links between commerce and gardening are often left only 'marginally visible' and, until recently, articulated by few garden historians. Sir Joseph Banks (1743 – 1820), for example, is a key figure in the history of horticulture, placed in charge of the gardens at Kew by King George III with many species of plants named after him. It was also Banks who had drawn up the original plan to transfer tea plants from China to India in 1788, a task which was, however, not to be completed successfully until after the Opium War. Banks is only one such example of the close links between the development of colonialisation and plant collection.[527] Holmes et al observe that 'There was an integral relationship between colonisation and gardening: the latter had a practical role to play in providing food for the colonists, but it was also a way in which settlers left their imprint on the land they claimed. It was a sign

[527] It is not horticulture alone that has connections to colonialisation .The historical development of many areas of knowledge have links to empire and colonialism. The work of Frank Boas and Lewis Morgan in the developing field of anthropology has led writers such as Claude Levi-Strauss, for example, to observe that anthropology was 'the handmaiden of colonialism'.

of imperial power, a mark of possession and ownership'.[528] Although the authors here are addressing the history of Australian settlement, there are obvious parallels which may be drawn and in her paper examining the 'post-colonial landscape' of *The Assam Garden* Brydon considers the space of the garden in both 'aesthetic and ideological terms' by drawing attention to its construction through 'the fixed male gaze of a colonial official'.[529] She goes on to argue that in the film the garden, in terms of its 'postcolonial mobilities … operates as a space of oppression and resistance'.[530] For Helen too the garden begins as a site of oppression, but through the work that she carries out with the help of her neighbour it becomes a space of affirmation. Significantly, it is through the support of Ruxmani that the garden is completed and the Assam garden is thus appropriated by the two women as their space, challenging notions of gendered and colonized landscapes.

The Assam garden is Arthur Graham's nostalgic recreation of his memory of India, the kind of 'idealized aesthetic representation' suggested by Bermingham[531] in her work on ideology and landscape. This part of the garden is described as very much Arthur's project and is in marked contrast to the rest of the garden which shows a typical English garden more in the relaxed style of William Robinson. The English country garden with its herbaceous borders of delphiniums, lupins, lilies and carnations popularized by Robinson and Jekyll are not for him. Instead, there is an assertion of authority and masculinity through the use of the alien and exotic species which remind him of his time in India, when he was adored and had a position of some respect. The garden here is a nostalgic medium for a time remembered. That the garden is an attempt to re-create the past is reinforced by the images we are shown of Arthur: he is always walking with the Indian women or in his military uniform, never in the

[528] Holmes, K., Martin, S.K. and Mirmohamadi, K. (2008) *Reading the Garden: The Settlement of Australia*, Melbourne University Press, p.8.
[529] Brydon, L. (2014) p.1.
[530] Brydon, L. (2014) p.22.
[531] Bermingham, A. (1987) *Landscape and Ideology. The English Rustic Tradition, 1740-1860* Thames and Hudson 1987.

present. These are Helen's memories of him, but for her the colonial enterprise was never one she was comfortable with; both her conversations with Ruxmani and her visual memories connote a sense of distance. Although the garden features a number of exotic plants, in the main these do not have their origins in India. The Indian garden which Arthur seeks to recreate is replaced by the exotic. The phormiums and cordylines are native to New Zealand, while the gunneras and daturas orginate from South America. Although more common in English gardens in the twenty first century, in the 1980s these would have been difficult to find and expensive to purchase. Only the bamboos and bananas might be found in India. This is a re-creation of an Indian garden using exotic plants to render the idea rather than the reality.[532]

The vast and impressive gardens of historic English houses such as Blenheim or Stowe, or even smaller estates such as Nymans or Merrifield, the garden, according to Rotenberg, may be seen as material art and thus a commodity 'onto which people project the power to alter the way [they are] perceived by others'.[533] The Assam garden which Arthur creates not only has a nostalgic purpose in reminding him of his time in India, but it also serves to signal that he was a man of means and someone who has enjoyed status and position at another time, even if he does not do so now. The narrative trajectory of *The Assam Garden* shifts the point of view from that of Helen's late husband and the identification of the garden as his space to an approach which privileges the feminine. From being a demonstration of Arthur's position and a nostalgic re-creation, it is Helen who comes to increasingly dominate the space through her activity in it.

[532] In his book, 'A Gloucestershire Wild Garden' which he wrote after he created his own exotic garden, Cook lists the plants which are suitable for this purpose. In addition to the above, he includes Eremurus, Rheum, Eulalia and points out that these are being grown for their overall effect.

[533] Rotenberg, R. La Pensée Bourgoisie in the Biedermeier Garden in Conan, M. ed. (2002) *Bourgeois and Aristocratic Cultural Encounters in Garden Art, 1550-1850,* Dumbarton Oaks, Harvard University, p.147.

Examining the process of settlement in the film *The Proposition* Dalziell notes the importance of women to the colonial enterprise.[534] In working on the garden, albeit in her husband's memory, it might be suggested that Helen is herself complicit in this post-colonial endeavour.[535] Using Higson's argument that heritage films show 'a greater concern for characters, place, atmosphere and milieu than for dramatic, goal-directed action',[536] Brydon suggests that the camera focus on the planting in the garden often through high-angled shots enables a 'conservative' reading of the film, through which Britain's colonial past becomes 'the object of a public gaze'.[537] This 'fixity'[538] enables not only control of the object, but also disables the possibility of challenging its use. Approaching the subject from differing perspectives, both Rose[539] and Said[540] have argued that domination of the landscape has been achieved by the colonizing white male and thus Arthur, from his past as the manager of a tea plantation, seeks to regain a semblance of this control in recreating his Assam garden.[541] However, I suggest that in its focus on the work of Helen and Ruxmani and the relationship which develops between the two women, the film successfully negotiates this difficult territory. Ruxmani is a powerful presence in the film, at first insinuating herself into Helen's daily life, but ultimately becoming a source of friendship and a reckoning with the past. It is Ruxmani who enables Helen to recognise the nature of the 'Indian garden' and to navigate questions of identity and belonging while working alongside her in an equal partnership. Towards the end of the film the idea of friendship between the two women is referred to twice, once when Ruxmani reminds Helen that she should think of her friend when working

[534] Dalziell, T. (2009)
[535] Brydon, L. (2014) develops this in more detail. See also Dalziell, T. (2009) Holmes, K., Martin, S.K., and Mirmohamadi, K. (2008) *Reading the Garden: The Settlement of Australia*, Melbourne University Press; Said, E. (1994) , Vintage Books.
[536] Higson, A. Re-presenting the National Past: Nostalgia and Pastiche in the Heritage Film in Friedman L. eds (2006) *Fires Were Started. British Cinema and Thatcherism,* Wallflower Press, Great Britain, p.99.
[537] Brydon, L. (2014) p.12.
[538] I have borrowed the term from Said's work, *Orientalism,* (2003), Penguin.
[539] Rose, G. (1993)
[540] Said, E. (1994)
[541] Possession and control of landscape and land has been ably explored by Cosgrove, D. and Daniels, S. eds. (1988) *The Iconography of Landscape*, Cambridge University Press; Mitchell, W.T. ed. (1994) *Landscape and Power,* University of Chicago Press and Matless, D. (2016) *Landscape and Englishness*, Reaktion Books, London.

in the Assam garden and again on the card that she leaves behind for Helen to find. It is their activity in the garden that has enabled these contradictions to be resolved.

On the occasions when Helen finds herself imagining or remembering her husband walking through their garden in India, he is always accompanied by several Indian women. Following slightly behind this little group and at the very edge of the screen can be seen another figure, who we can assume to be the younger Helen. Strolling along carrying a basket, she is unengaged in the laughter and chatter of her husband's group, seemingly isolated in the garden and observing her husband with the other women. Helen's separateness in the garden may be read in several ways: in the past she is depicted as remote from her husband; but in the present she is trying to manage a garden where she is represented as initially not at home in its space. In both instances a distance is created between Helen and the enterprise of colonialisation. The film is to capture Helen's journey from a position of insecurity to one of independence, one which describes a conventional feminine passivity to one of control and a final rupture between her and any sense of empire.

In *The Culture of Horticulture*, using terminology borrowed from Joyce Chaplin, also Laird points to the 'paracolonial project'[542] of acquiring exotic plants from other countries, which was in general a male task, and describes the historical cost of such gardens.[543] In *The Assam Garden*, it is Helen's husband who has brought in the exotic species in what might be described as his own 'paracolonial project'. The degree of Helen's complicity in this project is debatable. Gardens and landscapes are not neutral territory but the product of social relations and the film emphasises the work involved in maintaining and renovating the garden which, until his death, has been carried out by Arthur. Ruxmani's part in this

[542] Laird, M. The Culture of Horticulture in Conan, M. ed (2002) *Bourgeois and Aristocratic Encounters in Garden Art 1550 – 1850,* Dumbarton Oaks, Cambridge University Press.
[543] Nymans garden in Sussex, for example, was set out by Oliver Messel, who championed plant collectors to find species from around the world. Today the garden still holds some of the original trees and shrubs.

endeavour collapses the conventional roles ascribed to the colonised and coloniser both in the help she gives to Helen, the friendship she offers and her view of the garden as an Indian garden. The success of the garden will be a result of the work of both women, who have worked together collaboratively blurring the boundaries of conventional femininities and borders.

Gerlach's[544] suggestion that images of gardens on screen draw on visual codes has some relevance to an analysis of *The Assam Garden* both in the idea of the enclosed garden as sanctuary and in the use of an aggressive planting style and, in particular, to its association with colonisation. The plants used in this part of the garden have obvious associations with a colonial past, both in Arthur's acquisition of them and their original introduction to Europe. They are also unlike the plants which would be found in a typical English herbaceous border and, as is evident from the film, require a substantial amount of maintenance and, for Helen, this is a forbidding prospect. Significantly, it is a task which she probably would have been unable to complete without the help of her Indian neighbour.

Helen's memory of India is one of displacement and loneliness and Brydon rightly points to her recollections of India as unbearably hot and as having poor sanitation, thus emphasising the difference between the position of her husband and Helen's own experience which, according to Brydon 'emphasises the film's interest in gender as an essential component of the colonial experience'.[545] However, Brydon goes on to argue that the film successfully 'eschews any charge of 'Raj revisionism'[546] by emphasising the work necessary to maintain the garden and the camera-work which does not 'prioritise any perspective that can be attributed to the Western explorer'.[547] The friendship and equality of exchange that develops between Helen and Ruxmani further shifts conventional power

[544] Gerlach, N. (2013) Historical garden design as an ethical argument in film - 'Certain gardens are described as retreats when they are really attacks' in *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes: An International Quarterly.* Volume 33, Issue 2.
[545] Brydon, L. (2014) p.7.
[546] Brydon, L. (2014) p.14.
[547] Brydon, L. (2014) p.16.

relations of the coloniser and colonised. Helen's instructions to Ruxmani at the start of the film reinforce an unequal power relationship, but the garden provides a space in which the two women can collaborate equally, enabling Helen to develop her own sense of identity in a postcolonial world. By the end of the film, Helen has freed herself from her husband's position not only through her activity in the garden, but also through the relationship which develops between her and Ruxmani. For Arthur, the garden is undoubtedly an exercise in nostalgia as he seeks to re-create time spent in India and, as Ruxmani points out on several occasions, "It is Indian garden". However, the ideas of nostalgia embedded within the film work on many levels. Ruxmani is nostalgic for India as her home, while her husband raises the question of where home might be. For Helen, home is definitively England, but for Arthur a sense of belonging is enmeshed with his feelings of control. To limit the film to an exploration of colonialism is to restrict its possibilities.

5.4 The garden in film

W.J.T. Mitchell is one of a number of writers who have created an argument for an increased consideration of landscape in film, '…landscape exerts the passive force of setting, scene, and sight. It is generally the "overlooked," not the "looked at"…'.[548] This manner of looking, or not looking, at the landscape has implications for the way that the garden has been viewed, or overlooked, in film. In 1973 Raymond Williams had already commented that 'rural Britain was subsidiary, and knew that it was subsidiary, from the late nineteenth century'.[549] More recently, in the introduction to his collection of essays on landscape and cinema, Fish suggests that it is the urban which is viewed as 'the most important form of social organisation' able to document a range of historical and contemporary experience'[550] and Fowler and Helfield similarly write, 'Urban space in the cinema has been endlessly represented and theorized as the primary site of national change and progress and as a benchmark of

[548] Mitchell, W.J.T., (2002) *Landscape and Power*, The University of Chicago Press, p. vii.
[549] Williams, R. (1973) *The Country and the City* London: Chatto & Windus, p. 248
[550] Fish, R. ed. (2014) *Cinematic Countrysides*, Manchester University Press, p. 2.

modernity in and of itself'.[551] Fish goes on to note that, despite some recognition of the Western landscape, heritage cinema and the landscape of horror, the countryside has been seen to 'have little purchase on these 'perennial' concerns'.[552] As the cover description of the book notes, although space and place have come to prominence in contemporary academic study, in the field of film studies 'critical inquiry has tended to explore this issue as a question of the "city" and the "urban"'.[553] Bondi and Rose in a similar vein, note the centrality of the 'urban' in feminist geographical discourse, 'The urban was identified as a key spatial scale through which gender is constituted'.[554] However, the possibilities of the garden as a subject for study are pointed to by Konstantarakos who suggests that the garden as a space contributes to 'the dynamics of the narrative' but additionally 'plays an important part in the development of a variety of considerations, both ideological and artistic'.[555] In *The Assam Garden* it is the garden in and around which the narrative and activity takes place, providing an opportunity for representation and theorizing which Fowler and Hellfield among others have viewed as the domain of the urban.

The garden, or landscape garden, is of course a visible feature in film; in heritage film, westerns and costume drama in particular, but it largely serves as the setting rather than the subject, with little attention paid to it in terms of its contribution to the story line. Few films have used the garden to direct the narrative of the film. In film, the garden provides the setting for action to take place, but space and setting in film have most often been viewed as peripheral from the perspective of academic discourse. Yet in an interview with Ian Christie[556] Martin Scorsese, talking about his film *The Age of Innocence*

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[551] Fowler, C. and Helfield, G. eds. (2006) *Contemporary Approaches to Film and Television. Representing the Rural: Space Place and Identity in Films about the Land*, Wayne State University Press, p.1.
[552] Fish, R. ed. (2014) p.3.
[553] Fish, R. ed. (2014) backcover.
[554] Bondi, L. and Rose, D. (2003) Constructing gender, constructing the urban: A review of Anglo-American feminist urban geography in *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, 10:3, 229 – 245. Accessed 07 September 2015 http://dx.doi.org/10.10980/0966369032000114000. P.230.
[555] Konstantarakos, M. (2000) *Spaces in European Cinema*, Intellect Books UK, p.1.
[556] Christie, I. Passion and Restraint. Ian Christie talks to Martin Scorsese in Vincendeau, G. ed. (2001) *Film/Literature/Heritage*. A Sight and Sound Reader, BFI Publishing

(1993), lauds the filmography of Merchant Ivory films and their attention to the detail, commenting that in his own work, 'The décor had to become a character for me'.[557]

In his discussion of the postcolonial landscape aesthetic of John Ford's film *The Quiet Man*, Slater is one of the small number of academics to address the use of the landscape in film and argues that its (re)presentation may function ideologically. He points out that there is a 'case for treating landscape … not merely as a picturesque backdrop, but as a layer of meaning in its own right' .[558] Although Slater's focus is on the use of an English garden as a representation of Irish landscape, his foregrounding of the space of the garden is one of the few to do so. Slater goes on, ' … the appearance of silence from a landscape … does not imply the absence of language or cultural symbols …'.[559] Although Slater does not refer to Lefebvre's[560] discussion of cinematic landscapes, his argument resonates with the ideas put forward by Lefebvre who refers to the notion of 'intentional landscape' where the visual construction of the landscape, or garden, invites the audience to consider the space itself, rather than simply as a background to the narrative. Lamenting the lack of attention given to the garden in Western films, which almost exclusively concentrate on vast sweeps of landscape, Dalziell focuses on the representation of the garden in an Australian film, *The Proposition* (dir. John Hillcoat, 2005), where she examines the role of the garden as a civilizing influence and boundary between order and lawlessness. In her analysis the garden is an area which marks a separation of spaces, variously occupied by Captain Maurice Stanley, his wife and their house servant and gardener. Stanley's wife, Martha, is explicitly aligned with the garden; the homestead is assumed to be a protected place and the proper domain of the woman and it is emphasized that here she is safe. Dalziell traces the film's narrative and shot structure as these boundaries of safety and threat eventually collapse.

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[557] Christie, I. (2001) p.68.
[558] Slater, E. (2009) The Postcolonial Landscape Aesthetic of the "The Quiet Man", in *NIRSA Working Paper Series,* No.45, February 2009, p.4.
[559] Slater, E. (2009), p.5.
[560] Lefebvre, M. (2006) Introduction in Lefebvre, M. ed. *Landscape and Film,* Routledge.

Tom Brass[561] also considers some of the problems in the representation of the land in film in considering the way in which what he terms 'the agrarian myth' is reproduced. Critical of the ideological implications of this representation, he examines a wide range of films from D.W. Griffiths' *Birth of a Nation* (1915), through Coppola's *Godfather* trilogy (1972, 1974, 1990) to Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* (2000) and endorses the arguments put forward by other writers: that the ways in which land has been used and the values placed on that use need to be examined.

In her study of historical gardens in film, Gerlach[562] directly addresses the representation of the garden on screen. She examines the ways in which a range of gardens have been used, beginning with *Roundhay Garden Scene* (1888), to the garden of the Villa Arpel in Jacques Tati's *Mon Oncle* (1958), *Vatel* (2000) *Orlando* (1999) and the various iterations of *The Secret Garden*, arguing that, 'The cinematic garden plays a crucial role'.[563] Referring to Foucault's concept of discourse, she explores how the images of gardens presented on screen structure ideas by drawing on visual codes. She points to associations of Count Dracula's castle as standing in for 'evil', while an enclosed garden implies sanctuary. This 'genre topology', she suggests, results in the correlation of particular styles of garden with certain characters.

Concentrating as they do on images of landscape and the garden in films, the analyses of Dalyziell, Slater, Gerlach, Fowler and Brass[564] highlight the lack of any extended discussion of the garden in

[561] Brass, T. (2001) Reel Images of the land (beyond the forest): Film and the agrarian myth *The Journal of Peasant Studies,* Vol.28, No.4, July 2001, pp1-56.
[562] Gerlach, N. (2013) Historical garden design as an ethical argument in film - 'Certain gardens are described as retreats when they are really attacks' in *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes: An International Quarterly.* Volume 33, Issue 2.
[563] Gerlach, N. (2013) p. 2. Gerlach's idea of linking moral ideals to garden models has some resonance with Bermingham's (1987) analysis of garden styles historically and with the argument put forward by Schor (2007), both suggesting that the ornate gothic was viewed, for example, as somehow not really English and in some ways degenerate.
[564] Dalziell, T. (2009), Slater, E. (2009), Gerlach, N. (2013), Fowler, C. (2006) and Brass, T. (2001)

English film.[565] Such scholarly inquiry which has been carried out has tended to concentrate on the countryside and the larger landscape rather than the domestic garden.[566] In this study I propose that many of the problematics raised by a study of the cinematic landscape are reproduced in the domestic garden in film. Rather than be 'overlooked'[567] I argue that the space of the garden provides an opportunity to re-frame a number of questions which are most frequently associated with the urban, not least the representation of femininity.

5.5 *The Assam Garden*

Studies of British film in the 1980s argue that what made it distinctive was the way in which it responded to the social changes during the decade. Hill, for example, sees British cinema in the 1980s as 'split between films which looked to the past and those which addressed the present'.[568] Set in the 1980s, *The Assam Garden* clearly encompasses anxieties about change and shifting boundaries. In the film, Helen does not use local shops, but is visited by a grocery van which delivers the items which she needs. The woman who drives the van tells Helen that this grocery round is coming to an end, as most people now use the new Asda supermarket which has opened up nearby. Ruxmani and her husband similarly experience a sense of displacement: their son is married to a woman who Ruxmani feels is far too westernised and does not uphold Indian custom and tradition.

The disruption of boundaries is a theme which circulates throughout the film. These boundaries may be emotional or physical, or ascribed to the certainty of social values. At one point in the film, Helen

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[565] There has been some examination of the public garden in film. See Lebas, for example, who examines the importance of public gardens to ideas about well-being Lebas, E. The Clinic, the Street and the Garden: Municipal Film-making in Britain Between the Wars, in Konstantarakous, M. ed. (2000) *Spaces in European Cinema*, The Cromwell Press.

[566] Fish points to the wide variety of uses to which the 'cinematic countryside' has been put. Additionally see Fowler, C. and Helfield, G. eds. (2006) *Representing the Rural. Space, Place and Identity in Films about the Land*, Wayne State University Press. See also Harper, G. and Rayner, J. eds. (2020) *Cinema and Landscape: Film, Nation and Cultural Geography*, Bristol GBR.

[567] Mitchell, W.J.T. (2002) p.vii.

[568] Hill, J. (1999), p.74.

discovers a boy in the garden who has evidently found his way in through a broken fence. After admonishing him for his intrusion, Helen puts together a sign with the words 'Keep out' on it and knocks this into the ground at the site of the break in. "This is my garden" she tells him. In keeping with the low-key register of the film, this is not a moment which is particularly marked out. Yet it describes the point at which the garden does become Helen's garden, rather than that of her husband and a point from which her own identity and construction of what it means to be female are confirmed.

Suggestions of shifting boundaries are also evident in Helen's discussion with Mr. Lal, Ruxmani's husband. Ruxmani yearns to return to India and persuades Helen to convince Mr. Lal to agree to her plan. Helen uses perceptions of immigrants commonly held by English people as taking advantage of the welfare state to support her argument. Drinking tea in their home, Helen says that she can understand that returning to one's own country can be attractive, not least because one can be with one's own sort of people. "Who are my sort of people?" asks Mr. Lal, who considers himself to be English and has an English passport. On viewing Helen's garden for the first time, Ruxmani (homesick for India) says that "This is an Indian garden", and it is perhaps its exoticness which is attractive to her and which, in part, leads to her offer of help. These allusions to cultural incongruences occur throughout the film. While Mr. Lal is diagnosed with angina, Ruxmani feels that his illness is the result of a curse put on him by her daughter-in-law's family, a daughter-in-law who she views as overly westernised. After a fall, Ruxmani uses a "special ointment" made by a man from her village in India to relieve the pain in Helen's knee. "Is it anything that can't be done by 'Deep Heat'"? asks Helen. The mystery and exclusivity of the ointment is deepened by Ruxmani's disclosure that its creator has died and nobody now knows the secret of its ingredients. *The Assam Garden* contains all of these contradictions in its juxtaposition of the exotic and the English.

Despite her protestations to the contrary, Helen apparently has little social life and comes to depend on the visits she receives from her Indian neighbour, but references to the estate where the Indian family live are often disparaging. When Helen first meets Ruxmani and is asked to call for a doctor because her husband is ill, she refers to the Indian woman as, "One of the women from the estate". On the occasion that Helen leaves the garden hose running (there is a hosepipe ban because of dry weather) a representative from the local water authority calls on her. "Someone off the estate reported you … it's 'cos of them that the reservoir is low," he tells her. When Helen responds by saying that she was unaware of the hosepipe ban because she has no time to read the papers, he replies, "Some people have nothing better to do". Helen's distance from the estate is enhanced and exaggerated by long camera shots from her own garden. Implicit in the film is the idea that the boundaries of race and class cannot be maintained and are in the process of changing. With subtlety, *The Assam Garden* captures and exposes anxieties about social change in a film rooted in the present, without representing a nostalgic image of the past.

Although deploying some of the themes typical of heritage film in displaying a range of contemporary concerns, the past represented in *The Assam Garden* is not a nostalgic representation of a pastoral imaginary and the Graham's former life in India is hinted at in its complexity. The opening shots of the house do indeed present an 'image of an imposing country house seen in long shot and set in a picturesque and verdant landscape',[569] but this is the extent of the association.

According to Higson, although 'the number of feature films produced in Britain had fallen to an all-time low of just 24 films in 1981'[570] by the mid-1980s the industry had undergone a revival. Of the films made between 1980 and 1990, he notes that one out of every eleven films produced were costume dramas and most 'were set between the 1880s and 1930s'.[571] Higson goes on to argue that a number

[569] Higson, A. Re-presenting the National Past: Nostalgia and Pastiche in the Heritage Film in Friedman L. eds (2006) *Fires Were Started. British Cinema and Thatcherism,* Wallflower Press, Great Britain, p.97.
[570] Higson, A. (2006) p. 91.
[571] Higson, A. ibid

of these films, which he identifies as 'heritage films', looked to the past and referenced a nostalgic imaginary rooted in the pastoral. While contemporary society was in a period of change and upheaval heritage films, he argues, offered viewers a sense of stability and enduring values through a nostalgic representation of days gone by. Higson also suggests that these films 'share a particularly strong group style' with images of a country house set in a 'typical' English landscape and furnished with *objets d'art* 'constitute the iconography of the genre'.[572] A good deal of the criticism levelled at heritage films focusses on the tension between narrative and spectacle, typified by the use of camera shots which, according to Higson and Hill, serve no narrative purpose, focussing more on the *mise-en-scène* rather than follow the movement of characters. Higson's caustic criticism is directed at the way in which narrative space is used in what he describes as the lush spectacle of costume drama. Vincendeau,[573] however, sets this criticism in its political context and comments that, 'The conservativeness of the 'genre' has been sealed by the fact that Craig (1991), Wollen (1991), Higson (2006) and others all see a direct correlation between the rise of heritage cinema in the 1980s and Thatcher's Conservative government'.[574]

A shared characteristic of these films, located as they often were around large country houses, was the use of the garden as a setting for the interactions which take place between the characters and Brydon[575] draws attention to the features identified by Higson and others which support a more conservative reading of the film. A focus on Helen walking through the garden with the camera

[572] Higson, A. (2006) p. 96.
[573] Vincendeau, G. ed. (2001) *Film/Literature/Heritage*. A Sight and Sound Reader, BFI Publishing.
[574] Vincendeau, G. ed. (2001) p.xix. However, the debate surrounding heritage film is far more complex and multi-layered than indicated by the trenchant criticism of writers such as Higson and Hill. Vincendeau points out that although heritage film came to prominence during the Thatcher years, heritage films also dominated French cinema during the same period under a socialist government, thus questioning the irrevocable alignment seen by some between heritage cinema and the Thatcher government of the 1980s. She argues that, 'Heritage films constitute a 'genre' only in a loose sense' (Vincendeau, 2001:xvii) and encompass the work of directors as wide-ranging as Martin Scorsese and Jane Campion and also include elements of other genres.
[575] Brydon, L. (2014)

following her movements and then losing her amongst the abundant foliage certainly seems to serve no narrative purpose, but *The Assam Garden* is firmly located in the 1980s and resists both a nostalgic view and a presentation of the garden as something simply to be looked at. Here the garden is presented as worked on, a difference emphasised by Fowler[576] in her analysis of the of the work of the Belgian director, Storck. Fowler takes up Mitchell's idea of the represented landscape as universal space. Like Mitchell[577], she argues that the picturesque landscape offers a retreat, allowing the viewer to disengage rather than engage with the scene. Although she does not refer to Raymond Williams' 1973 publication, his comment that 'a working country is hardly ever a landscape' is implicit in the development of her argument. Thus, Fowler claims that Storck's series of films, *Symphonie Paysanne,*[578] contrast with ideas of landscape as view by presenting the land as worked. Of course, Storck's film is of an entirely different nature to the costume drama, or heritage film, in its documentation of the daily lives of Belgian country people, but it does point to the different uses to which the landscape, or garden, may be put in a film, the methods by which it may be represented and the different responses which it may evoke.

The Assam Garden draws on a range of conventions. The film emphasises the domestic, focussing on the ordinary and the everyday: the exchange of food; the recommendation of liniment for sprains; the purchase of food from a delivery van; a visit from the water board resulting from excessive water use; the unreeling of a water hose; weeding the herbaceous border. It is undramatic. The majority of the narrative is focussed on the activity of Helen and her neighbour within the domestic sphere of the house and garden. However, it is the garden itself which provides an extension of the domestic

[576] Fowler, C. "Symphonie Paysanne". An embodied and Embedded Picturing of the Land in Catherine Fowler, C. and Helfield G. eds., (2006) *Representing the Rural. Space, Place and Identity in Films about the Land,* Wayne State University Press Detroit.
[577] Mitchell, W.T. (2002)
[578] Directed by the Belgian filmmaker, Henri Storck, *Symphonie Paysanne* is a five part study of Belgian rural life made between 1942 and 1944.

boundary with its references both to the past and to other places. Foucault's work on heterotopic spaces describes the garden as 'the smallest parcel of the world and at the same time the totality of it" [579] once again pointing to the ways in which the garden encompasses a multiplicity of meanings. In *The Assam Garden* the garden is a liminal space between 'then' and 'now' and 'here' and 'there' in which the borders of experience, gender and memory are all explored. The boundaries of the garden, both physically and symbolically, are porous. The orderly interior of the house, the carefully arranged mementoes of a previous life and its seated patio areas reminiscent of a veranda on a tea plantation in India are juxtaposed with the garden which dominates the film. The references to a colonial past are evident, both in the objects itemised by the camera in interior shots and by the way in which the outdoor space is constructed, in some sense replicating a colonial lifestyle. However, the carefully constructed boundaries of the garden are breached by a boy using a shortcut through the space and by the past in the form of Helen's memories and also in the shape of Ruxmani, who brings with her the outside world as well as her nostalgia for the country in which she was born and brought up. In the space of the Assam garden, past and present are condensed, power relations reduced and the range of experiences which the garden represents are sifted and re-ordered.

5.6 Is *The Assam Garden* a feminist film?

Written and directed by women and starring a prominent female actor, questions arise over whether *The Assam Garden* may be called a feminist film or whether, focussing as it does on the garden as domestic space, conventionally defined as a space for women, it is a 'women's film'. Basinger defines a women's film as 'a movie that places at the center of its universe a female who is trying to deal with emotional, social and psychological problems that are specifically connected to the fact that she is a woman'.[580] Similarly, Kuhn defines a woman's picture as one whose 'themes involve moral dilemmas

[579] Foucault, M (1986) "Of Other Spaces", *Diacritics* 16 (1): 22-27, p.26.
[580] Basinger, J. (1993) *A Woman's View. How Hollywood Spoke to Women*, Wesleyan University Press, p.20.

and conflicts associated with sexuality, home and family'.[581] In some respects, *The Assam Garden* may then be described as a 'women's film' in that it foregrounds the lives of women. However, the subject matter with which it deals are at the same time universal: loss, identity, managing social change and the nature of home. *The Assam Garden* refuses simple classification, containing as it does a range of themes pertinent to all. The horticultural interchange of gender, race and class reiterates the point that the apparently uncomplicated and 'neutral' space of the garden merits a far more complex reading. Knepper[582], in her analysis of Kincaid's work, for example, examines how the garden contains both the large and the small, claiming that it is a place where significant 'worldly relations are regenerated'. *The Assam Garden* represents the garden as a mutable space capable of supporting a range of readings.

The domestic interior of the house is presented as a restful space, where Helen is depicted at ease, although it is also shown as a place of brooding inactivity. Near the beginning of the film, after Helen has read the letter from Great British Gardens, we are shown the garden as she looks at it through a window. In contrast to the conventional framing of the woman at the window, with its implications of restriction and constraint that typify the analyses that Doane[583] and Pidduck[584] have brought to bear on films of particular genres we see the garden through Helen's eyes. In her analysis of female artists, Pollock makes the distinction between *'woman-as-seen' and 'woman-as-eye'*[585] and this sets up the subsequent framing of the film. In *The Assam Garden*, it is the garden which is presented as the object of the gaze as the camera focuses on swaying stems of bamboo, sunlight glinting on raindrops, or the movement of leaves in the breeze. These are the few moments in the film which have a diagetic

[581] Kuhn, A. (1994) *Women's Pictures. Feminism and Cinema*, Verso, p. 198.
[582] Knepper, W. (2011) 'How does your garden grow?' or Jamaica Kincaid's spatial praxis in My Garden (Book): and Among Flowers: A Walk in the Himalaya in Teverson, A.T. and Upstone, S. (2011) *Postcolonial Spaces. The Politics of Place in Contemporary Culture*. Palgrave MacMillan UK.
[583] Doane, M.A. (1984) "The Woman's Film": Possession and Address, in Doane, M.A., Mellencamp, P. and Williams, L. eds. *Re-Vision: Essays in Film Criticism*, Los Angeles: AFI
[584] Pidduck, J. Of Windows and Country Walks: Frames of Space and Movement in 1990s Jane Austen Adaptations, *Screen 394*, Winter 1998.
[585] Pollock, G. (2001) A Hungry Eye, in Vincendeau, G. ed. *Film/Literature/Heritage* (2001) A Sight and Sound Reader, BFI Publishing

accompaniment. Views of the interior of the house are presented as periods of stasis, while Helen is never inactive in the garden, contesting more established views of the representation of the female figure in the garden as one who is 'a property of landscape itself' rather than a 'figure *in* landscape'.[586] The conventional view represents femininity within the domestic interior or as a passive object of the gaze in the garden outside and not one actively engaged in the external space, reflecting an established trope of inside versus outside.

In her discussion of melodrama and the women's film, Doane argues that 'Because the woman's film obsessively centres and re-centres a female protagonist placing her in a position of agency, it offers some resistance to an analysis which stresses the 'to-be-looked-at ness' of the woman'.[587] Smelik similarly comments that, 'the mere appearance of a woman signifies sexuality'.[588] In *The Assam Garden* Helen is not constructed as an object of the gaze. Had the role been played by a younger woman, the result may have been different, and it is clear from the comments made by McMurray that Kerr was chosen specifically for the 'grittiness' she would bring to the character.[589] The choice of Deborah Kerr as the star of the film is an interesting one. Clearly the actor would need to be old enough to have developed enough 'backstory' to provide the film with its subject. However, a number of other British actors would have been old enough to be eligible for the role, Julie Christie for example, born in 1940, would have been in her forties during filming and would have provided some substance to the role. Similarly, Helen Mirren, born in 1945, would have invested the role with a similar quality of 'grittiness'. The choice of an actor past middle age may be an attempt to shift the emphasis of the film away from what Doane describes as the 'to-be-looked-at ness' of the woman' onto the narrative and the garden. Helen's evident lack of attention to her hair, often wrapping it in a headscarf, her general

[586] Thornham, S. (2012) *What if I had been the hero?* Palgrave MacMillan, p.129.
[587] Doane, M.A. (1984), p. 286.
[588] Smelik, A. (1998) *And the Mirror Cracked: Feminist Cinema and Film Theory*, Palgrave, p.158.
[589] In an interview for *Location 85,* with Barry Norman, Mary McMurray notes that Deborah Kerr has the kind of 'grittiness' which she feels was required for the character of Helen in the film.

appearance in wellington boots and baggy cardigans, contradict any notions of sexuality. Helen's being 'in the garden' shifts attention away from accepted representations of femininity to a construction of femininity which is self-determining and it is in the space of the garden where she is able to fulfil this promise. Elisabeth Bond points out that the character of Helen is loosely modelled on that of her aunt, who displayed precisely that 'sharpness and vulnerability' which it was felt that Kerr brought to the role.[590]

From the 1970s onwards, against a background of significant cultural change in which as Williams comments, 'the master narratives' were being rewritten[591] questions around femininity and the role of women became more explicitly represented on screen.[592] Feminist alternatives to dominant cultural representations appeared in popular films from *My Brilliant Career* (1979, dir. Gillian Armstrong) to *Desperately Seeking Susan* (1985, dir, Susan Seidelman) and *Orlando* (1992, dir. Sally Potter. In her work, Kuhn considers what is meant by feminist cinema and argues that alternatives to the dominant cinematic mode of production need not have a feminist intent on the part of the film-makers.[593] She suggests that it may also be 'cinema which operates outside the institutional and textual structures of dominant cinema to construct either subject matters, or modes of address …' (Kuhn, 1994).[594] In an interview for *Variety* [595] in 2017 Jane Campion remarked on the continuing lack of recognition for female film directors. '"We're a long way from really understanding the female experience of being in the world," Campion said. "There's not enough female storytellers out there. We've been brainwashed a

[590] In conversation with Elisabeth Bond, 5 December 2022. Unlike, Helen, however, Elisabeth's aunt was a practising surgeon.
[591] Williams, L.R. Everything in question: women and film in prospect in Cook, P. and Dodd, P. eds. (1993) *Women and Film. A Sight and Sound Reader,* Temple University Press, Philadelphia, p. xxv.
[592] See Cook, P. and Dodd P. (1993) *Women and Film. A Sight and Sound Reader,* Temple University Press for example and the chapter Williams, L.R. Everything in Question: women and film in prospect in particular.
[593] Although Showalter and Pollock, among others, argue that to be considered feminist art it must intentionally challenge the status quo.
[594] Kuhn, A. (1994) p.125. Kuhn also provides a longer discussion on the difference between a woman's film and feminist film.
[595] Accessed at https://www.google.com/ variety.com/top-of-the-lake-jane-campion-female-directors. 03/11/2022

bit by the patriarchal experience of the whole way of being in the world.'" *The Assam Garden* challenges the notion of a masculine way of 'being in the world' and it is perhaps made possible because the film is written and directed by women. In their choice of subject matter, the key roles in the film and their selection of an older actor to play the role of Helen Graham, *The Assam Garden* may be understood as a feminist film.

The issues confronted by feminists and progress achieved in the 1970s and 1980s have been critiqued by hooks[596] among others,[597] who have argued that the radical feminist politics of the 1970s was unable to properly address the white privilege which hooks views as embedded in feminist[598] movement. She argued that it is only by working together that women can bring to an end both sexist and racist oppression, 'Working together to expose and eliminate sexist socialization within ourselves, women should strengthen and affirm one another and build a solid foundation for developing political solidarity'.[599] Although hooks is here referring to political commitment, I suggest that in working together in the garden, the relationship between Ruxmani and Helen succeeds in establishing a degree of commonality between the two women, confronting their classed and racial differences and histories. Through working together in the garden, what begins as a rather uneven interaction develops into one of mutual respect, which recognises both the differences and similarities of their experiences, which Modelski (1996), for example, argues is essential to the development of what she describes as the 'feminist project'. In her analysis of cinema Modelski argues for the importance of 'theorizing a way to hold on to ties that bind women to one another – common experiences, similar backgrounds and/or

[596] hooks, b. Political Solidarity between Women in *Feminist Review,* Summer 1986, No. 23, *Socialist-Feminism: Out of the Blue* (Summer, 1986) pp 125-138 https://www.jstor.org/stable/1394725. Accessed, 29/12/23.
[597] See also Michele Barrett (1985) Ethnocentrism and Socialist-Feminist Theory *Feminist Review* No. 20; Hazel Carby (1982) White Women Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood in *Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies* (1982)
[598] I use here hooks' own term in which she omits the definitive article.
[599] hooks, b. ibid. P.129.

values and ideals' (Modelski, 1999)[600], while at the same time recognising difference and in the Assam garden Helen and Ruxmani, quite literally, use that common ground to 'find those ties that bind'.

Helen's relationship with Ruxmani begins as an unequal one. Helen is a white middle class woman living in a substantial house on a large plot of land, while Ruxmani, who is from India, lives on an estate of newer and smaller houses and is even reliant on her wealthier neighbour for the use of a telephone. At the start of the film, Helen constantly gives Ruxmani instructions on pruning, or watering, or weeding, but this approach soon makes way for a more collaborative endeavour where the two women talk about their lives, their hopes and fears. Disagreements over the benefits of liniment, or the nature of home enable the two women to come together in a way which hooks might define as a more realistic sisterhood. In its unobtrusive representation of the relationship between two women with different histories, it could be suggested that *The Assam Garden* creates a framework for intersectional feminism. Both Helen and Ruxmani are developed as fully rounded characters, each with their own flaws – of prejudice, manipulativeness, snobbery and impatience. The two women bond over their shared commitment to completing the garden. The recognition, acknowledgement and respect for difference is evident in the trajectory of the relationship as it develops between the two women.

Feminist geographers have devoted considerable attention to the way in which space(s) is defined and this work has informed analyses of the representations of women. Fabricant[601] has described the ways in which land, nature and landscape have historically been aligned with the female body, while feminist cultural geographers have considered the differing meanings which space has for men and women. Thornham[602] considers the implications of these discourses to women and film. Drawing on the work of Virginia Woolf she points to Woolf's construction of female exclusion through her occupation of space, or elimination from it. In film, Thornham argues, landscape is male territory, to be traversed and

[600] Modelski, T. (1999) *Old Wives' Tales. Feminist Re-Visions of Film and Other Fictions*, I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd. New York, p.6.
[601] Fabricant, C. (1979)
[602] Thornham, S. (2012)

possessed. In the early stages of *The Assam Garden* Helen is shown as marginal, both to her husband's life in India and to the garden he has created, but the film charts Helen's journey as she increasingly comes to occupy the garden she works on. The film juxtaposes stillness and movement: raindrops on leaves, sunlight glinting on water with Helen's activity. The interior of the house is presented as calm and still, the kind of space traditionally associated with women. By contrast, Helen moves between exterior and interior. At times she is viewed through a window, at others she views the garden through a window and the audience sees the garden from Helen's viewpoint. Helen's activity is characterised by fluidity and movement. The gendering of the space of the garden is challenged by the representation of both Helen and Ruxmani. Thornham draws attention to 'the gendered identification of male subject/hero as conqueror of space (and bearer of time)'.[603] In *The Assam Garden*, Helen subverts this identification by dominating the space of the garden herself and, while we can see from the flashbacks in the film, that her husband may have at one time been the principal figure, he has been left in the past. In placing Helen as central to the narrative and in control of space and time, *The Assam Garden* may be described as a quietly feminist film. Postfeminist film has often created a female hero, one who is tough, active and capable of dispensing violence,[604] but in *The Assam Garden*, McMurray has created a female figure who unobtrusively subverts conventional representations.

In his work, *Landscape and Film*, Lefebvre suggests that 'spectacle halts progression of the narrative',[605] arguing that the way that landscape has been used in film frees it from any narrative function. Mulvey's analysis of women in film argues that the appearance of the woman on screen has a similar effect. In her discussion of the male gaze, Mulvey suggests that the presence of conventional representations of the female figure in film, 'tends to work against the development of a story-line, to freeze the flow of action'.[606] In *The Assam Garden* Helen is seen working *in* the garden, she is not seen

[603] Thornham, S. (2012), p.128.
[604] See for example, films directed by Sally Potter and Katherine Bigelow.
[605] Lefebvre, M. ed (2006) *Landscape and Film*, Routledge, p. 28.
[606] Mulvey, L. (1989) *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Macmillan, p. 19.

as a property of the garden itself. She is not simply described, but plays an active role in the creation of her surroundings. Rather than playing a 'bit-part' in someone else's journey, most often a male, the journey that Helen undertakes in the film is her journey and not one that belongs to Charlton Heston or another male hero character and, in doing so, she subverts the conventional 'hero narrative'.

In itself, the matter of whether or not *The Assam Garden* is a feminist film is perhaps of no great importance. However, examining the film in a feminist context enables a consideration of a range of issues which would otherwise be obscured. In *What If I Had Been The Hero?* Thornham quotes Mellencamp's work, "'When I was a young girl … I wanted to be a boy … I was too restless and impatient for femininity, which was quiet, unobtrusive, dull … Boys moved through space. Girls stayed in place'".[607] The sentiment resonates with Kerr's comment on the script of *The Assam Garden*, describing it as one of the few opportunities where she 'is not saying ten lines at the bottom of the sea in an aircraft …. waiting for Charlton Heston to come along and rescue me'.[608] Thornham argues that it is important to examine films which 'bear the signature of women' and 'engage with those issues which have been of concern to feminist theorists: questions of subjectivity, of narrative and its relation to gender … of the gendered ordering of space and time, and of regulation and agency'.[609] The passive representation of a female figure in the garden is challenged in *The Assam Garden*, where Helen's activity is the subject of a personal journey and the development of a sense of agency and control. For hooks the 'appropriation and use of space are political acts' and spaces can be 'interrupted and transformed through artistic and literary practice'.[610] In its representation of the two women in the space of the garden, *The Assam Garden* also contests dominant discourses of class, gender and race.

[607] Thornham, S. (2012), p.4.
[608] *Film 85 Location Report* with Barry Norman. YouTube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P0SQu9ejOSs. Accessed:30 June 2017
[609] Thornham, S. (2012), p.1.
[610] hooks, b. (2015) *Yearning. Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*, Routledge, New York, Oxford, p.152.

5.7 'A woman's place': a garden history

In his book[611] Henry Cook, the original architect of the garden at Priors Mesne, clearly revels in the creation of what he perceives as a typical English garden and there are many occasions in his writing where he describes the beauty of the country he has imagined while far away in India. Cook was born in the early nineteenth century (1832) and died in the early twentieth century. He had trained in medicine and qualified as a surgeon in 1854, joining the Bombay Medical Service as assistant surgeon in 1855 where he achieved some seniority as principal and professor of medicine at the Grant Medical College in Bombay and was dean and faculty head at the University of Bombay. He retired in 1886 with the honorary rank of surgeon-general and returned to England to Priors Mesne where he lived until 1904. Cook wrote a book about his experience of creating the garden at Priors Mesne, which he titled 'A Gloucestershire Wild Garden', and it was published in 1903. In his writing he refers to the large number of good books already in existence on gardens and gardening, but he makes specific reference to William Robinson:

> And here I would mention one that has been of the greatest service to me, as an amateur gardener, and one amongst the very best that I know – I mean Robinson's "English Flower Garden'.[612]

For Henry Cook, the English garden was something he had imagined while in India, "I used to picture to myself the home in England I hoped to form at some distant date, and visions of a house ensconced in woody depths, with gardens here and there in unexpected places … with a view over England's charming scenery which … loomed even more beautiful than the reality, if that be possible'.[613] The garden for Cook, as it does for Arthur, becomes a similar instance of 'loss and imaginative recovery'.

Like von Arnim, it is likely that Henry Cook had read Alfred Austin's book, *The Garden That I Love*.

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[611] Henry Cook 1903, 'A Gloucestershire Wild Garden', Elliot Stock, London. P vii Personal details from Royal College of Physicians website, Lives of the Fellows (Acc 19 May 2017) (Munks Roll) shows Henry Cook b 1831-2 d 30 May 1927.Cook, H. (1903) *A Gloucestershire Wild Garden*, Elliot Stock, London.
[612] Cook, H. (1903) *A Gloucestershire Wild Garden*, Elliot Stock, London, p. vii.
[613] Cook, H. (1903), p. v.

Although he does not specifically refer to it: on page 6 he writes of '"the garden that I love"' and has this short phrase in inverted commas, which seems to indicate a reference to Austin. Austin's garden book refers to the woods adjoining the house and the English oaks there, while Cook calls the Oak, Silver Birch and Chestnut 'homely forest friends'. Although not developed in as much detail, like Austin, Cook describes contemporary debate in the conversations which take place between himself and visitors to the garden. In his introduction he describes these as 'evanescent matter' and 'interleaved humour'. Cook's book describes the creation of the various sections of his Gloucestershire garden, including one chapter on 'The Exotic Garden', in which he includes Canna Indica, Zingiber, Musas, Hedychium and uses a range of bamboos as the 'backbone' of the planting. To add to the 'atmosphere' of the garden he adds Musas (Fig.5.5), Rheums, Nicotiana, Datura, Aralia, Gunnera and Ricinus Communis.

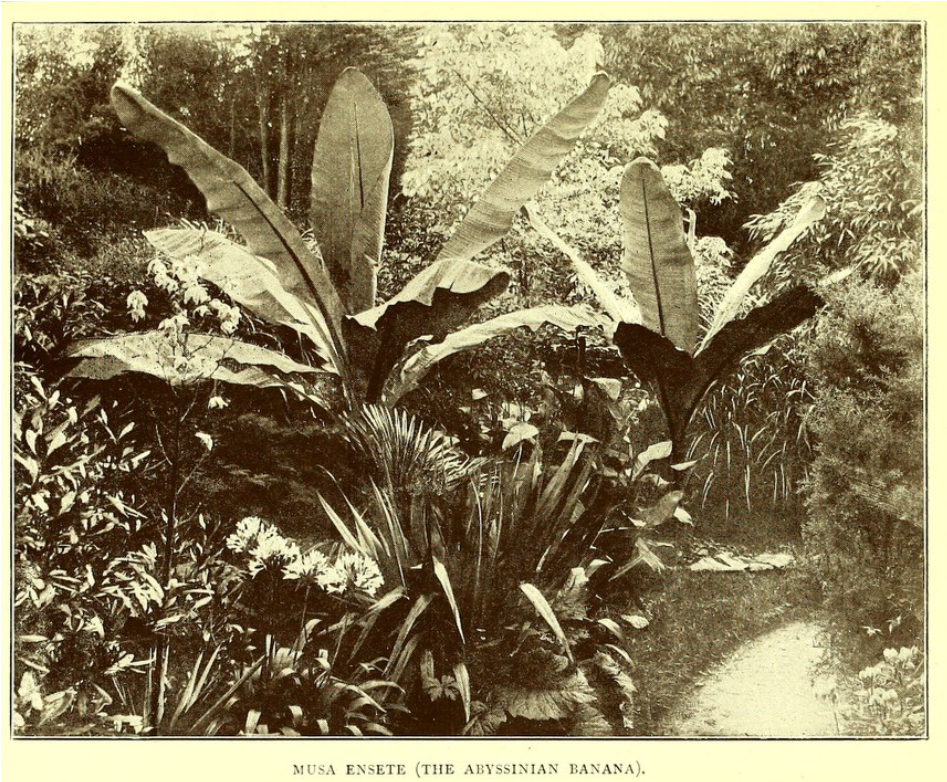

Fig. 5.5
Photograph of Musa Ensente in Henry Cook's Gloucestershire garden.
Cook, H. (1899) *A Gloucestershire Wild Garden,* p. 50 facing page
Available at: https://wellcomecollection.org/works/eut8dn7b
(Acc. 26 June 2023)

Cook demonstrates a keen awareness that many of the plants he has chosen originate not in India but other parts of the world, using them to create the effect he is seeking to establish. Cook describes the garden that he has built and in which he smokes a pipe and drinks tea with his friends, whom he calls The Professor and The Padre. Long conversations on scientific subjects, or the nature of memory take place and are recounted in detail, while a whole chapter is devoted to the nature of beauty. In doing so, Cook remains faithful to the 'Garden that I love' described by Alfred Austin, where the garden is depicted as a male retreat, where men can sit together and discuss worldly matters. Women only feature fleetingly in this Gloucestershire garden – in poems and, at one point, as the subject of the discussion. On one occasion the Curator (as Cook calls himself when in conversation with his friends) and The Padre and The Professor are discussing the value of intellectual work as opposed to manual labour when the 'daughter of the house' appears. Mention is made of a young man who has shown some interest in the daughter which The Professor probes, but is dissuaded in his remarks by The Mater, ' … the Mater was uneasy at the tone of things in general, and perhaps sympathized with the Padre in that feminine way which is so charming with the sex when they instinctively take the weaker side …'.[614] In Henry Cook's garden the women are peripheral presences, only occasionally interrupting the conversations of the three men and only then to serve tea. When the daughter arrives to tell the men about a conversation which she has been having, '"We have been talking of the good time coming when the rights of women shall have their proper recognition," said she, with a light of laughter in her eyes', the significance of this statement is completely denied by The Professor who responds, '"The beauty of woman has always ruled the world with an undisputed sway, replied the Professor; 'but whether the demands of a less charming section of womanhood will wrest any rights from man which he lawfully holds is ever doubtful"'.[615] Cook's garden book highlights the garden as a male retreat, from which women are largely excluded. In *The Assam Garden* the garden as retreat is signalled in the film

[614] Cook, H. (1903), p. 181.
[615] Cook, H. (1903), p. 135.

by its focus on the plants and trees, with the sun sparkling on distant water, but Helen is not visible in these shots. For Helen, in her daily maintenance and refurbishment of the space the garden is the opposite of retreat.

5.8 Doing gardening

In bringing the garden to completion and ready for its entry to 'Great British Gardens', Helen disrupts conventional associations of femininity and the garden. Although some of the restoration involves the typical country house herbaceous border, Helen is also shown clearly working in the exotic garden among the plants acquired from other places around the world by her husband. Gendered male in its acquisition and creation and imperial in its nostalgia, Helen undermines prevailing systems of representation which depend on the figure of the woman as spectacle. Through her activity in the garden, patriarchal structures and Helen's gendered experience of colonialism are complicated and collapsed, allowing for the possibility of emancipation.

The work of renovating the garden which falls to Helen offers her a degree of freedom and a space in which she can realise her own identity. The film makes clear that Helen does have some sense of independence. She comments on her earlier wish, like the friends she has studied with, to have a career, but notes that "one by one" they all got married and so did she. Following Ruxmani's suggestion of hiring a man to help her in the garden, Helen comments that she cannot afford this, but here again there is a sense that she is determined to manage. For Helen, although the labour of the garden is evident, it is also increasingly her own space. It is an example of the way in which the work of creation can function to develop identity, what Bending in his study, identified as, 'the shaping of physical space is also the shaping of identity'.[616] A space which, initially, was very much her husband's creation and from which she felt excluded, has been made, through her own activity, into her own. Towards the end

[616] Bending, S. (2013), p. 1.

of the film, Helen once again imagines her husband in the garden. As he recedes into the distance, she calls out to him: 'Don't go, you silly man'. In her work on the garden, it seems, that she has also exorcised his ghost.

Like *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, the focus of the film is on the quotidian – interior shots show Helen making a cup of tea or reading a letter; in the garden she is tying in roses, pruning and putting dead vegetation onto a bonfire. The visual style of the film is quiet and undemonstrative; Brydon describes it as a 'modest drama'.[617] *The Assam Garden* is thoroughly bound up with process, work, and activity, with what Fowler[618] considers the intimate, daily and specific. A New York Times review of the film (July 30, 1986) written by Walter Goodman, in fact, is critical of this centrality of gardening activity, 'For one thing, there's too much of Miss Kerr mowing and manuring, watering and weeding, spraying and snipping' (Fig. 5.6). Goodman's criticism of the extended focus on the activity of gardening reflects those of O'Connell[619] and Schaffer[620] on the lengthy passages of plant descriptions which von Arnim offers in *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, where both view Elizabeth's descriptions of plants as 'boring textual material'.[621] Francis and Hester define the garden as,

> [existing *simultaneously*] … as an idea, a place and an action…. One cannot fully understand the idea of the garden without probing the ideas which generated the materials … and without knowing something about the process that created it.[622]

Neither the Assam garden, not the film, may be fully understood without examining the process of creation itself. Helen's activity is key to the development of the film, her own place in the garden and her own sense of self.

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[617] Brydon, L. (2014) p.4..
[618] Fowler, C. (2006).
[619] O'Connell, R. (2017),
[620] Schaffer, T. (2000)
[621] O'Connell, R. (2017), p.10. Lists of 'boring textual material' seem to be viewed differently depending on the publication and author. James Joyce lists a long catalogue of trees in *Ulysees,* which has not elicited the same response.
[622] Francis, M. and Hester, R.T.Jnr. (1995) *The Meaning of Gardens*, The MIT Press, London, Massachusetts, p.8.

Fig. 5.6
Helen carrying out watering and weeding, dressed in her gardening gear.
Dir. Mary McMurray *The Assam Garden* (1985)

Traditional associations of the garden with peace and tranquillity are teased at in the film. Secluded from the world around it, the space of the garden symbolizes peace and calm. In the film, however, for Helen the garden is less of a retreat and, whilst it is initially a source of tyranny in the Herculean task required to complete it, it is ultimately an opportunity to develop her sense of self, apart from and in opposition to her late husband. When the Great British Garden's representative comes to visit, Helen points out that the garden was her husband's idea and his creation. The film traces the journey which Helen takes in recognising her own identity and separation from the dominance of her husband and the garden provides a vehicle for this. For Arthur and Helen, the enclosed sub-tropical exotic garden holds different associations. There are periods in the film where the camera focuses on nodding branches, raindrops on leaves and the swaying of the bamboo, connoting a space for reverie and retreat. The music attached to these scenes is lilting and calm. O'Connell's[623] suggestion that the experience of

[623] O'Connell, R. (2017) 'Love Scenes and Garden Plots: form and femininity in Elizabeth von Arnim's Elizabeth and her German Garden'. Available at: https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Love-Scenes-and-Garden-Plots Retrieved on 25/04/2021

sanctuary differs between men and women is reflected in Helen's situation where the space of this garden is not initially one of sanctuary, but is presented as a trial to be overcome.

The Assam Garden focuses with singular purpose on the activities and the people. The landscaped garden by contrast, viewed in paintings and on screen is often free of human activity, or at least the activity of the people who have created it. In the film, the Assam garden is presented as a specific place, real and intimate. In their study of allotment gardening, Crouch and Ward[624] make a similar point: that the allotment garden is inextricably bound up with process, work, and activity, with what Fowler would consider the intimate, daily and specific, which (for many) makes it an unsuitable subject. By contrast, *The Assam Garden* is full of exactly that kind of activity, which so irritated Goodman. In her interview with Barry Norman, Kerr again alludes to the amount of activity in the film: 'When I read this script, I didn't read the instructions that lay between the lines … Helen unrolls the waterpipe for miles and miles and miles; Helen hammers the piece of wood into the ground'.[625] She claims she has not seen so much activity in a film 'since *King Solomon's Mines*.[626] The film emphasises the work required to carry out the renovation and maintenance of the garden. The space of the garden is defined differently for Helen. For Helen, the garden is not commodified; the completion of the garden is not part of a (male) para-colonial project, nor is it a (male) retreat. The garden is defined by and defines Helen's femininity in opposition to its construction as a space to be conquered and used to sustain a male identity. Helen's experience of the garden begins with feelings of a loss of control, but concludes with a sense of liberation. For Helen the garden provides an opportunity to assert her identity. In the interview with Barry Norman in 1985, shortly after the film was released, Deborah Kerr gives a clear indication of her interest in the character of Helen in the film. She describes it as 'the best script' she has read in a very long time, ascribing activity and direction as feminine qualities.

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[624] Crouch, D. and Ward, C. (1988) *The Allotment,* Faber and Faber.
[625] *Film 85 Location Report* with Barry Norman. YouTube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P0SQu9ejOSs. Accessed:30 June 2017
[626] *Film 85 Location Report* with Barry Norman. YouTube.

5.9 Summary and conclusions

The Assam Garden is unusual in its depiction of gardening activity. In doing so it challenges existing conventions of the ways in which gardens are represented on screen and the ways in which women are represented in those gardens. The garden and gardening activity are placed at the centre of the film and show a woman, with the help of another woman, struggling with the challenge of re-creating a garden. Depicted in the film are the converging interests of gender, class and colonialisation all of which evoke various borders and boundaries and it is in the garden where these interests converge, intersect and are challenged. The foregrounding of Helen's experience in overcoming the obstacles posed by renovating her husband's garden and the specific representation of femininity occupying and possessing the space of the garden may owe much to the fact that both screenplay and direction were authored by women.

The femininity represented by Helen Graham at the start of the film is one dependent on her husband; a femininity at ease in the domestic interior and one which presents conventional alignments. The garden offers Helen the space where she is able to disrupt these alignments and where she reclaims this exotic Gloucestershire garden as a space for a woman. As the person to whom the responsibility falls to maintain the garden, her role disrupts traditional alignments of femininity, plants and the garden. The garden represented in *The Assam Garden* is, at the start of the film, an intimidating space for Helen and one which she has, almost literally, to do battle with. Helen's work on the garden and her changing relationship with it are symbolic of a femininity which represents the female figure in the garden as one who is active and has agency.

In its portrayal of Helen Graham as a woman who comes to dominate the space which she has been given *The Assam Garden* offers a representation of the woman in the garden as active and

independent. Helen, as Kerr remarks, is not waiting passively to be rescued by the male hero figure, nor is she represented as one who is aligned with nature and the natural through her femininity. Like Arthur, Helen can also control nature and the external space and in doing so disrupts the association of the woman and the natural. Conventional positions which view women confined within the domestic space of the home and garden are undermined, through both Helen's physical activity through the space, but also her shifting of the space-time boundaries in her conversational recollections of life in India and her reveries.

Like *Elizabeth and her German Garden,* the represented space of the garden in *The Assam Garden* provides an opportunity to explore issues and concerns. For Elizabeth it was a space where she could read and consider philosophical matters; for Helen the garden is where she can discover who she is in relation to her husband and her own past and also what she is capable of becoming. Ideas of femininity are gently exposed through Helen's activity in the garden and her conversations with her neighbour, Ruxmani. The themes identified by Daniels of the, 'personal and political, local and national, epic and everyday',[627] belonging and difference are explored in the garden and these are articulated through the exchanges between the characters in the film. 'The film is undramatic in its representation of a woman struggling to maintain a large garden; even Helen's fall does not result in hospitalisation, but simply the offer of liniment from her neighbour. The film exposes issues around social change, memory, gender and loss and these underpin a narrative where the garden provides the space in which they are explored.

Through its investigation into the representation of the garden in film, this chapter has introduced and explored the ways in which images of the garden continue to be used in conventional ways and how

[627] Daniels, S. Love and Death across an English Garden: Constable's Paintings of His Family's Flower and Kitchen Gardens, in The Huntingdon Library Quarterly, 1992 Vol 55 issue 3 pages 433-458, p.443.

the intersection between the real and imagined space of the garden is represented on screen. Themes which have been discussed in previous chapters continue to have relevance to a discussion of *The Assam Garden*. Ideas of enclosure, self- determination, restraint and convention and their appropriateness to definitions of femininity resonate here too. Bending begins his study with 'the assumption that the shaping of physical space is the shaping also of identity and that gardens are microcosms, speaking of and reacting to a world beyond themselves'[628] and he argues that the enclosed garden offered women of a certain social class in the eighteenth century an opportunity to assume some kind of agency over the creation of not only their own lives, but their identity. This mixture of freedom and constraint is epitomized in the Assam garden; Helen is simultaneously offered an opportunity to re-create the garden as well as to re-create herself.

Despite its quiet and understated delivery, *The Assam Garden* undermines prevailing systems of representation which depend on the figure of the woman as spectacle. Using the garden, the film exposes and subjects to analysis conventional representations of femininity, and the interaction between woman as ideal construction and the way in which women may construct themselves.

[628] Bending, S. (2013), p. 1.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

We live our lives through texts. … Whatever their form or medium, these stories have formed us all; they are what we must use to make new fictions, new narratives'.[629]

'Fantasy is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise; it establishes the possible in excess of the real; it points elsewhere'.[630]

The aim of this thesis has been to examine how perceived differences between genders have found their reflection in the ways that gendered bodies, and the female in particular, have been represented in the space of the garden. I began this work by exploring conventional representations of femininity as they are presented in the domestic garden, a space habitually aligned with the female. A garden history which is typically gendered male[631] and an art history which has perpetuated notions of femininity[632] through its representation of the woman in the garden has consolidated constructions of femininity which reinforce notions of the female as essentially maternal, domestic and passive. A femininity perfectly encapsulated by Parsons'[633] painting of "The Smell of Summer' (1901), in which a woman in a pale gown leans to smell the scent of a rose in the herbaceous border (Fig.6.1).Neither the pale dress not the large hat indicate that this is a woman who is engaged in any kind of activity in the garden apart from a leisured stroll to appreciate the flowers. The gown, the pose and the framing of the female figure rather more align the woman with nature and plants, an image imprinted on the mind's eye through the paintings of the Impressionists and the Pre-Raphaelites. These are among the texts which, according to Heilbrun, 'have formed us all'.[634] My work recognises this construction and argues that the texts

[629] Heilbrun, C. (1989) *Writing A Woman's Life,* The Women's Press, p37.
[630] Butler, J. (2004) *Undoing Gender,* Routledge, New York, p29.
[631] See Way, T. for example (2006) *Virgins, Weeders and Queens. A History of Women in the Garden,* Sutton Publishing.
[632] See Pollock, G. for example (2003) *Vision and Difference. Feminism, femininity and the histories of art*, Routledge
[633] Beatrice Parsons (1870 - 1955) was one of the most popular artists of her day, commissioned to paint the gardens and buildings of Lutyens and Jekyll and her work bought by Queen Mary. Yet following an exhibition of her work in 1904, *The Times* remarked that she was possessed of 'a dainty talent', her work considered to be 'treading in Mr. Ellgood's steps'. George Ellgood (1856 - 1943) painted the frontispiece for Alfred Austin's *The Garden That I Love* in 1904, when it appeared in illustrated form. Acc 16/05/2023. https://thegardenstrust.blog/2014/11/08/beatrice-parsons-queen-of-the-blazing-border/
[634] Heilbrun, C.(1989)

selected for my study each in its own way creates a new fiction and a new narrative in its representation of women, offering an alternative which 'points elsewhere'.

Fig. 6.1
Parsons, B. (1901) *The Smell of Summer*
Available at: https://thegardenstrust.blog/2014/11/08/beatrice-parsons-queen-of-the-blazing-border/
(Acc.18/06/2023)

The apparent constraining nature of the garden is critiqued in the seminal work of Wilson,[635] in *The Sphinx in the City,* where she explores the character of urban life and the development of cities from a feminist perspective. In her introduction she notes that she will, '…explore how underlying assumptions, ideas about women's rightful place, have determined the shape of contemporary cities'.[636] It is these same assumptions about women and place which have created conventional representations of women in the garden, locating the garden as a place where women may be removed from the public sphere and be occupied with the domestic. As Wilson points out, this gendering of space continued well into the twentieth century. She goes on to suggest '… that in the end, urban life, however fraught with

[635] Wilson, E. (1991) *The Sphinx in the City*, University of California Press.
[636] Wilson, E. (1991), p9.

difficulty, has emancipated women more than rural life or suburban domesticity.[637] It seems to me that Wilson is here referring to those typical representations of women in the garden which suggest precisely those characteristics of passivity and restraint which, she claims, the city liberates women from. My work argues, however, that just as the city enabled a degree of liberation for some women it also created poverty and grinding hardship for many others. In the same way the domestic garden, conventionally viewed as a space of constraint and passivity, provides an opportunity to disturb accepted notions of femininity. These possibilities are articulated through the fantasised other described by Butler and embodied in the work of von Arnim and Greenaway's film, *The Draughtsman's Contract*, but also through the creation of alternative narratives of femininity which we see in the horticultural writing of Jane Loudon and Mary McMurray's film, *The Assam Garden.*

My Introduction examines the shifts in scholarship which have taken place in the study of gardens and in particular the relationship between women and gardens, pointing to the work of Bermingham, Willis, Brown, Hoyles and Bending[638] among others who have each sought to create a space within the discourse for women. I have also identified the ways in which literary scholars such as Dewis[639] and Page and Smith [640] and the study of botany[641] have each contributed to a more detailed understanding of the ways in which female identity has been formed through horticultural concerns and the ways in which women themselves have played a part in its development. I have drawn on a range of theoretical sources such as the work of feminist cultural geographers Massey and Rose[642] and the feminist approaches to art history of Nochlin and Pollock[643] to examine the relationship of women to the space

[637] Wilson, E. (1991), p10.
[638] Bermingham, A. (1987); Willis, M. (2014); Brown, J. (1999); Bending, S. (2013); Hoyles, M. (1991).
[639] Dewis, S. (2016).
[640] Page, J.W. and Smith, E.L. (2011)
[641] Shteir A.B. (1996) *Cultivating Women. Cultivating Science*. The John Hopkins University Press.
[642] Massey, D. (1994); Rose, G. (1993).
[643] Nochlin, L. (2021); Pollock, G. (1988) .

of the garden both physically and as they are visually represented. Additionally, the work of both Mulvey and Berger[644] have formed touchstones for my discussion of the representation of women.

Until recently, much of the existing scholarship on gardens concentrated on garden designers (male) and great gardens as a stylistic progression through historical time periods,[645] reflective of what Bushnell terms 'a hierarchy of discourse'[646]. Fresh approaches to the study of landscape that have arisen out of cultural geography have created a framework for a cultural and historical analysis of the garden as a space in which the representation of gender is conditional and subject to change. The range of discourses introduced in the Introduction circulate through and inform the remainder of my thesis.

Daniels' comment, referred to in previous chapters, that gardens sit at the intersection of the 'personal and political, local and national, epic and everyday',[647] has perhaps been a contributing factor in the diversity of perspectives which have claimed the garden as their subject of study. The garden has been studied from the point of view of garden historians, cultural geographers, social historians, through the development of botany and horticultural sciences and from the perspective of literary studies and in my Introduction I have discussed the shift from an exclusively historical focus on the development of the garden to an emphasis on the social aspects of garden history. Although Dixon Hunt was one of the first to adopt a more conceptual approach to a study of the garden drawing together art, literature and poetry into a study of garden history, he also uttered a warning note, arguing that garden history would be marginalised by, 'literary studies, geography, botanical history, sociology, anthropology and cultural

[644] Berger, J. (1976); Mulvey, L. (1989).
[645] There are some exceptions to this. Susan Groag Bell, for example, in "Women create gardens in male landscapes: a revisionist approach to eighteenth-century garden history" (1990) *Feminist Studies* 16 471-491 examines the role of women in garden history. John Dixon Hunt has written *Greater Perfections* (2000) Thames and Hudson and *The Figure in the Landscape* (1976) Johns Hopkins University Press both of which take an academic and socio-cultural approach to the garden
[646] Bushnell, R. (2003) *Green Desire. Imagining Early Modern English Gardens*, Cornell University Press.
[647] Stephen Daniels 'Love and Death across an English Garden: Constable's Paintings of His Family's Flower and Kitchen Gardens', in The Huntingdon Library Quarterly, 1992 Vol 55 issue 3 pages 433-458.

history to name but a few disciplines [which] have each set its sights on the study of the garden'.[648] I argue, however, that approaches which selectively derive from a single academic perspective have conventionally served to create a dominant narrative from which women (and also people of colour and the working class) are excluded. It is only more recently that multi-disciplinary studies have examined the garden, or landscaped garden, as a site for the expression of colonial power,[649] as an important aspect in the formation of national identity[650], as a site of class relations[651] and as a gendered space.

Like Rose, I argue that the space of the garden is 'extraordinarily complex'[652] and an evaluation of the garden from a multi-disciplinary perspective exposes continuities and discontinuities in the ways in which women are represented in this space, often contradicting if not directly challenging dominant discourses of femininity. For women, the unequal access to both real and imagined spaces is reflected in representations which are themselves confined and restricted. By using a variety of texts, ranging from horticultural advice through garden romance to film, this study uses both the real and the imaginary in its examination of these representations, exploring how they have presented their audiences with 'new fictions, new narratives' of femininity. What all of the texts discussed have in common are representations of femininity where women use the garden to step outside the private sphere of the domestic and challenge conventional discourses, whether that be physically, or symbolically in their use of language. Rather than being constrained within their domestic setting, each of the textual representations which have formed this study have constructed women who demonstrate varying levels of agency.

While issues around the representation of women, of race and the working class came to prominence in successive waves through the 1970s and beyond, it is my assertion that representation continues to

[648] Dixon Hunt, J. Approaches (New and Old) to Garden History, Conan, M. ed. *Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium on the History of Landscape Architecture,* 21 (Washington DC. Dumbarton Oaks Library and Collection), p78.
[649] See Mukerji (1993), Brydon (2014) and Hoyles (1991) ibid
[650] See Bermingham (1987) and Helmreich
[651] See Hoyles, (1991), Berger (1976)
[652] Rose, G. (1993) p155.

be of key importance.[653] In this thesis I have chosen to focus on the representation of women, identifying the garden as a space in which dominant representational accounts of femininity have constructed women in particular ways, while also enabling those social constructions to be challenged and subverted.

Fundamental to this debate has been the use of language and my discussion of *The Draughtsman's Contract* in particular focuses on the ways in which the language of horticulture and the association of women with the garden has served to inform a discourse which presents a singular view of femininity. Fabricant's work on the perceived alignment of the female with land(scape) in the eighteenth century has clear overlaps with that of Ortner's[654] more recent discussion of gender in the late twentieth century. As Ortner has pointed out, the gendering of 'Nature' remains a key issue, not only through the ways in which women have been identified with 'the natural' but because implicit in this connectedness are notions of power and subjugation. From the perspective of cultural geography, Rose has similarly suggested that the feminisation of the landscape needs to be problematised. It is not only the land(scape) which has been gendered female but the earth itself. Expressions such as 'virgin land' and 'Mother Earth' continue to feature in the English language[655], as does the perceived masculine ability to see the 'bigger picture', which I have discussed in more detail in Chapter Four. Metaphorical associations of women with land and nature, demonstrated in conventional representations of women in the garden which I have examined in my Introduction, have created a problematic discourse of female passivity and one which identifies the female as object and lacking in agency. The ways in which the landscape is represented refracts and reflects the relationship between culture and society and therefore its power structures; the representation of women in the landscape or in the garden, the

[653] See also, for example, Riz Ahmed's comments to Channel 4's annual diversity lecture (Riz Ahmed warns of lack of diversity on TV will drive young to Isis, *Guardian* 2 March 2017) on the representation of ethnic minorities.
[654] Ortner, S. (1996) Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture? *Feminist Studies*, Boston: Beacon Press. 5-5.
[655] As does the gendering of a whole range of objects such as cars and boats, which themselves have to be managed and directed.

importance of spatial structures, of who is to be included or excluded all draw on discourses of gender. The representations offered by von Arnim, Jane Loudon and the women in the two films selected for analysis, each in their own way disrupt the traditional alignment of the feminine with nature, disturbing habitual ascriptions of femininity with plants and shifting conventional notions of nature and what is naturally feminine.

Both *The Assam Garden* and *The Draughtsman's Contract,* released in the 1980s, stand in sharp contrast to the femininities presented in many films of what has been called the postfeminist period[656] characterised as beginning during this decade. The femininity presented by postfeminism was typified by a discourse which emphasised individuality and asserted that women and girls be recognised as consumers, powerful citizens in their own right and in control of their own bodies, choosing how they wished to present themselves. In *The Aftermath of Feminism*, McRobbie[657] argues that although postfeminism had asserted female power, this was still achieved within the conventional codes of femininity, described by Thornham as, ' self-surveillance, self-modification and consumption'.[658] Gill and Orgad emphasise this focus on the individual in their definition of postfeminism as a 'an individualistic, entrepreneurial project that can be inculcated by the self'.[659] While it may be argued that the approach described in the two films selected as the subjects of study place emphasis on the individual, implicit is a challenge to the status quo. In *The Assam Garden* Helen is a middle-aged women who spends much of the film in wellingtons, a headscarf and cardigan. Her agency rests in her ability to renovate a garden originally created by her now-deceased husband, while developing her own sense of self and purpose. Neither is Ruxmani simply a cipher representing India or Indian femininity, but a fully rounded character

[656] See Negra, D., for example, *What a Girl Wants: Fantasizing the Reclamation of Self in Postfeminism,* Routledge. Negra and McRobbie among others see this beginning in the 1980s and continuing through the 1990s into the 2000s.
[657] McRobbie, A. (2009) *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change,* Sage.
[658] Thornham, S. (2012) p2.
[659] Gill, R. and Orgad, S. (2015) The Confidence Cult(ure), *Australian Feminist Studies*, 30:86, 324-344, DOI: 10.1080/08164649.2016.1148001. P.334. Acc. 25.05.2023

capable of contradictions and deceptions. There is nothing of the sexy 'kick-ass' girl power in the film, which typified many of the period. Set in an entirely different era, *The Draughtsman's Contract* similarly skirts notions of 'girl power', vesting control in the women in the film through their appropriation of male dominated language. While Helen, Mrs. Tallman and Mrs. Herbert do not offer significant challenges to patriarchal structures, they do present a set of resistances and refusals which fray at the edges of patriarchy and which combine to undermine prevailing systems of representation which depend on the figure of the woman as spectacle. By the 1980s, the accommodations which needed to be made by Jane Loudon and Elizabeth are no longer necessary. The women represented in *The Draughtsman's Contract* and *The Assam Garden* offer no apologies for their rupture of boundaries between the public and private and the means they use to secure their right to property.

Notions of femininity linked to delicacy and detail suggested in the work of Schor[660] thread through the chapters of this thesis. In contrast, the attributes of resilience, robustness and strength not characterised as typically feminine qualities, for the middle-class woman at least, are evident in the representation of Helen and her gardening activity. The work she carries out is labour-intensive: moving the wheelbarrow, unravelling hosepipes and watering, in addition to which she also falls from a stepladder but fails to be prevented from further work. This 'grittiness' is referred to by both Elizabeth Bond when discussing her aunt who was, in part, the model for the character of Helen Graham and also by Mary McMurray in the Barry Norman interview with Deborah Kerr.[661] Jane Loudon's work must, at times, seemed never-ending as she worked to maintain the family income, garden and travelled with her husband and child to source material for their gardening journals. A degree of hardiness would have been essential. While Stott comments that 'Dependence and passivity are concepts clearly

[660] Schor, N. (2007)
[661] Film 85 Location Report' with Barry Norman. Accessed Youtube 30 June 2017.

expressed through flowers, whose principal function is decorative',[662] Davidoff and Hall note that in the mid-nineteenth century to be 'large, or loud, or strong, was to be ugly' and 'strong, large women depart from both moral and physical standards [of beauty]'.[663] In the alignments of women and flowers, women and botany and associated activities, it is not only that small decorative activities are seen as suitable for women, but that women themselves should be small – Davidoff and Hall refer to 'delicate, shrinking femininity'. Usborne's work on von Arnim notes that she too emphasised her smallness, perhaps feeling that this would in some way compensate for her writing activity and her presence in the public sphere. Conventional representations of femininity in the garden connote the dependence and passivity associated with flowers and the natural, yet the representations I have discussed define the space of the garden as an opportunity to create what Heilbrun calls 'new narratives', presenting a rupture with conventional alignments.

In his study, *Green Retreats* Bending begins with 'the assumption that the shaping of physical space is the shaping also of identity and that gardens are microcosms, speaking of and reacting to a world beyond themselves'.[664] Hunt and Daniels have also offered a definition of the garden as both a bounded space, but also one which relates to other areas of society and the natural world and it is this interrelatedness which has informed more recent studies and my own approach. The two films, the subjects of this thesis, are in every sense about boundaries: the boundaries of class and religion, the physical boundaries of the garden, the boundaries described by the frame of the screen and the boundaries ascribed to women. In *The Assam Garden* Helen, too, is keen on the observation of the boundaries of her property and dislikes the intrusion of neighbours and children taking shortcuts through it. Yet both films point to the porosity of these boundaries as the women negotiate fresh terms

[662] Stott, A. Floral Femininity: A Pictorial Definition, in *American Art,* Vol.6 No. 2 (Spring 1992) pp 60-77, pub by University of Chicago Press on behalf of Smithsonian American Art Museum, p.62. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3109092

[663] Davidoff, L. and Hall, C. (1987) *Family Fortunes. Men and Women of the English Middle Classes 1780 – 1850,* Routledge.P.191.

[664] Bending, S. (2013), p.1.

and conditions for the construction of femininity. The Assam garden itself, that part of her garden with which Helen wrestles most and which is most particularly her husband's creation, brings together plants from all over the world crafting a garden reminiscent of his own in India. In *The Draughtsman's Contract* Mr. Talmann irritably comments that the garden at Compton Anstey is becoming "a veritable jungle with influences and introductions from everywhere". Both films point to the inclusivity of gardens, not only through their bringing together a range of plants, but also through the language of horticulture. When Talmann's nephew, Augustus, and his nanny walk through the garden she recites for him 'A is for apricot, Mist fur Marille,' bringing together the German and English alphabet and using the unifying language of horticulture. Jane Loudon's horticultural publications similarly reflect the ways in which the garden draws on a wide range of influences in her inclusion of botanical classification, history and origins of plants, and both Latin and common names with some of her descriptions including details extending over several pages, introducing her readers to countries around the globe. The nature of identity underpins both films, with both *The Assam Garden* and *The Draughtsman's Contract* pointing to problematic notions of Englishness. Both Laird (2002)[665] and Helmreich[666] (2002) note that the 'Englishness' of the English garden is a matter of some debate. Nymans garden in Sussex, for example, (Fig. 6.2) regarded as quintessentially English, includes plants and shrubs brought to England by plant collectors at the end of the nineteenth century and again points to the porosity of borders and boundaries.

[665] Laird, M. The Culture of Horticulture in Conan. M. ed. (2002) *Bourgeois and Aristocratic Cultural Encounters in Garden Art 1550 – 1850,* Dumbarton Oaks, Washington D.C;
[666] Helmreich, A. (2002) *The English Garden and National Identity. The Competing Styles of Garden Design, 1870-1914.* Cambridge University Press.

Fig.6.2
Parsons, A. (1914) *The Garden at Nymans*[667]
Available at: https://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/1206448
(Acc. 19/07/2023)

This study does not dispute the predominance of male garden designers, nor the boundaried nature of the domestic garden, particularly in its implications for women, but it does draw attention to the ways in which conventional perspectives of female passivity and restraint may be and have been challenged by representations of femininity created within the space of the garden and the ways in which boundaries may be breached. Chapter One discusses Jane Wells Webb Loudon who, in the mid-nineteenth century was among the first women to participate in the male-dominated world of journalism, proposing a scientific method of gardening and an engagement that disputed traditional views of femininity in its encouragement of women to take practical action. A prominent figure during her lifetime, Jane Loudon was also 'the first professional woman garden journalist to 'cover' the Floral Fêtes given by the Horticultural and Royal Botanic Societies in their respective official gardens'.[668] Although not provoking a direct challenge to patriarchal structures, Jane Loudon's negotiation of the public and private spheres – such difficult territory for women in the nineteenth century – demonstrated that not only was it possible to do so, but actively suggested that women should look outside the home. The pages of her

[667] It was Alfred Parsons who also illustrated William Robinson's *The Wild Garden*
[668] Howe, B. (1961*) Lady with Green Fingers. The life of Jane Loudon*, London, Country Life Limited, p.11.

horticultural journals reflect the interests of a wide range of classes women, from those with a small balcony to those with larger estates. In providing a forum for the exchange of ideas and views Jane Loudon successfully enabled the formation of networks which served to promote the interests of women and may be viewed as a way of challenging the elitism of the conventionally dominated male space of scientific horticulture and so making the discipline and practice a more inclusive one. Both Harris,[669] Ehrenreich and English make the point that advice texts written by men 'rested on the denial or destruction of women's autonomous sources of knowledge; the old networks of skill-sharing, the accumulated lore of generations of mothers.[670] The gardening advice texts written by Jane Loudon offered her reader an alternative: an opportunity to engage with like-minded individuals with an interest in horticulture and to share the knowledge gained and to be able to learn new skills outside of a hierarchy of expertise.

Social class clearly plays a part in the achievements of the women in this study, whether fictional or real. Jane Loudon was herself solidly middle class, her father a wealthy businessman and her husband an established horticulturalist and author. Recognition of her work depended on a complex web of support, from her publisher, her husband and friends as well as her reading public and the dedications in her horticultural texts point to her connections to women in the upper class[671]. Of course, as Shteir points out it is perfectly possible that Jane Loudon's career would not have developed as it did were it not for her marriage to John Claudius Loudon. The role of family connections, particularly those of male

[669] Harris, D. Cultivating Power: The Language of Feminism in Women's Garden Literature, 1870 – 1920, *Landscape Journal*, Fall 1994, Vol. 13. No 2. Pp. 113-123. Available at: https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Cultivating-Power%3A-The-Language-of-Feminism-in-Harris/6632e07ba1187976fde6d4d30ff56141a5327f81

[670] Ehrenreich, D and English, D. (1978) *For Her Own Good:150 Years of the Expert's Advice to Women*, New York: Anchor/Doubleday, p.4.
Although on a different subject entirely, Ann Oakley makes a similar point regarding the 'professionalisation' of maternal care and childbirth in Wisewoman and Medicine Man: Changes in the Management of Childbirth in Mitchell, J. and Oakley, A. (1976) *The Rights and Wrongs of Women*, Penguin.

[671] The Countess of Radnor, for example, in *The Ladies' Flower-Garden of Ornamental Annuals (1840).*

members, was strategically important for many women wishing to participate successfully in activities beyond the boundaries of the home. In her PhD thesis Reid[672] argues that upper class women who wished to become gardeners were better positioned to take advantage of the networks available to them. With the decline in John Claudius' health and eventual death, Jane Wells Webb's own opportunities became increasingly restricted and she lost control of one of the journals which she edited, which in turn had a significant impact on her earnings. Jane Loudon did not have the advantage of the buffer provided by the position of the upper class woman, free from the constraints of having to earn a living.[673]

A representational discourse of what Labbe calls a socially defined 'feminine landscape position'[674] which is a product of dominant structures, is undermined in the texts I have selected for study through the reconstruction of the woman in the garden as a figure of agency. My exploration of the space of the garden and the activity of women in it demonstrates its potential as a disruptor of conventional tropes of representation. Nevertheless, the ways in which women have been represented in the garden remains under-explored. In Alice Walker's essay In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens first written in 1972, where she describes her mother, she points to the garden as a source of liberation. For the woman in the garden the act of creating a garden may be transformative, not only in the sense in which she has the ability to transform and overcome the circumscriptions imposed on her, but in the effect that she has on the space around her. Walker writes,

> Whatever she planted grew as if by magic, and her fame as a grower of flowers spread over three counties. Because of her creativity with her flowers, even my memories of poverty are

[672] Reid, D. (2015) *Unsung Heroines of Horticulture, Scottish Gardening Women 1800 – 1930,* PhD paper submitted to University of Edinburgh. Unpublished thesis.
[673] Despite the huge contribution made by John Claudius Loudon to horticulture and the development of green spaces in England, there has been a significant failure to recognise his influence. With reference to this neglect, Brown (1999) comments that 'the English prefer their garden heroes to be aristocratic' (1999:153).
[674] Labbe, J. (1998) *Romantic Visualities. Landscape, Gender and Romanticism*, Macmillan Press Ltd. P.19.

> seen through a screen of blooms - sun flowers, petunias, roses, dahlias, forsythia, spirea, delphiniums, verbena . . . and on and on. [675]

An examination of the meaning of gardens for women of colour and the ways in which the space of the garden can provide an opportunity to re-frame black and brown femininities will produce new perspectives. Although the approaches of Brown, Way, Reid[676] and others has included working class women, little has been written on the ways in which representations of femininity may be embodied by working class women.

It was not unusual for women writers in the nineteenth century to engage with a range of issues in their work, but in the pages of her advice texts Jane Loudon asserts her own ideas: on the activity of women in the garden, the necessity to participate in issues of contemporary debate and on the support for working women. By the beginning of the nineteenth century it had become more socially acceptable and even positively encouraged for upper class women to express an interest in botanical pursuits. Jane Loudon, however, extended these subject boundaries to include journalism and science. As I have argued, she did not offer a challenge to patriarchal structures of the time, but through her representation of the female figure in the garden she opened up a space where women were presented with an alternative femininity of increased independence, physical activity and an engagement with the larger issues beyond the home and thus challenging routine discourses. Conventional representations of femininity have aligned women with the safety and enclosure of a space such as the garden, but as

[675] Walker, A. In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens, in Mitchell, A. ed. (1994) Within the Circle. An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Haarlem Renaissance to the Present, Duke University Press. P.408. Downloaded from http://l-adam-mekler.com/walker_in_search.pdf. 30/09/2022

[676] Brown, J. (2000) *The Pursuit of Paradise. A Social History of Gardens and Gardening*, Harper Collins. Reid, D. (2015) *Unsung Heroines of Horticulture, Scottish Gardening Women 1800 – 1930,* PhD paper submitted to University of Edinburgh. Unpublished thesis. Way, T. (2006) *Virgins, Weeders and Queens*, Sutton Publishing Limited.

Heilbrun points out these, 'are not places of adventure, or experience, or life'.[677] Nevertheless, Jane Loudon symbolically extended the space for her readers with her accounts of the origins of plants and the plant hunters who discovered them, while von Arnim allowed Elizabeth's thoughts to expand through her reading of philosophy in her German garden.

In her discussion of women's writing, Heilbrun argues that for women to achieve control over the narrative of their own lives it is essential for them to enter the public sphere. She puts forward the argument that, and here I paraphrase slightly, '… power is the ability to take one's place in …the discourse ..'.[678] Using a definition of feminism from Nancy Miller as the wish 'to articulate a self-consciousness about women's identity both as inherited cultural fact and as process of social construction',[679] she acknowledges that a woman writer's ability to find her own voice is fraught with difficulty. In this thesis I have not put forward the argument that Jane Loudon was inclined towards feminism in any way, yet she succeeded in making a space for herself within a predominantly male discourse and in doing so it may be argued that her work not only disrupted conventional representations of women in the garden, but the very action of doing so was in itself an act of defiance.

Although writing about female autobiographies, Heilbrun notes that they 'exploit a rhetoric of uncertainty'.[680] She identifies this characteristic as necessary for women to function in male dominated spaces and suggests that for men the public self is one which 'embodies strength', while for women – who are strangers to this space – the public face must be one which is tractable and more accommodating. This ambiguity is evident in the written texts included in my study not only in the way that the authors introduce their work – Jane Loudon makes it clear that she owes much to her husband

[677] Heilbrun, C. (1989) *Writing A Woman's Life,* The Women's Press, p.20.
[678] Heilbrun, C. (1989) ibid p.24
[679] Heilbrun, C. (1989) ibid p.18.
[680] Heilbrun, C. (1989) ibid p.23.

- but also how they presented their work in the public domain: von Arnim described her writing as a 'slender little talent'[681] sometimes referring to her work as 'story writing'. Feminine adjectives of domesticity, modesty and delicacy contrast sharply with the representations offered by Jane Loudon and Elizabeth. Their inclination to engage with gardening activities and, in the case of Jane Loudon, to disseminate her gardening skills and knowledge to a wider public audience, expose significant female agency. Gendered roles which emphasised male authority and female subservience are given lip service by the women in the texts in my work. Each of the representations discussed here describe women who are able to negotiate a space for themselves by using the language of horticulture or the activity of gardening with which to do so. What all have in common is the use of the garden as a space which enables them to engage with the public or male dominated sphere.

I have argued that Jane Loudon reconstructed the figure of the woman in the garden as one that is active and drew the attention of its female readers to a wider social and political discourse. Like Jane Loudon, von Arnim's work was highly popular in its day and also like Jane Loudon she negotiated the difficult spaces of public and private, metaphorically and physically, satirizing a dominant patriarchal discourse and articulating the possibility of less conventional modes of femininity. Unlike Jane Loudon, however, von Arnim's representation of femininity was one which clearly challenged the constraints of domestic life. Although the satirical tone and sly humour temper many of her observations, the implicit criticism remains. It is clear from von Arnim's portrait of Minora, who is presented as a modern woman, that she had little sympathy with the idea of a feminist movement and the Elizabeth of von Arnim's garden romances is presented as confronting convention in highly individual terms. Von Arnim's emphasis on the individual, is no doubt a reflection of the ways in which she managed her own life, with the garden offering a space in which mentally and physically a woman could extend the limits of her

[681] Usborne, K. (1986*) 'Elizabeth'. The Author of Elizabeth and her German Garden*, The Bodley Head, p.25.

activity. As I have suggested, von Arnim was not presenting a challenge to patriarchal structures, rather a series of what O'Connell describes as 'a set private practices of refusal and defiance'.[682] In the space of the garden the represented Elizabeth carries out her gardening activities as disobedient acts, challenging contemporary notions of femininity. The Elizabeth who is represented in the garden is far from the typical woman of the period and it is in the space of the garden where she is able to engage with alternatives to the kinds of femininity habitually ascribed to middleclass women, those activities symbolically gendered as male: the ability to read philosophy, to be creative, to be self-determining.

Like the women in *The Draughtsman's Contract*, von Arnim appropriates the language of horticulture for her own use. The descriptions employed by von Arnim do not objectify the female figure in the garden to create an image of passivity and restraint, ideas easily expressed through flowers whose primary function is to be decorative. Elizabeth even comments that ' … it having been borne in upon me lately that vegetables must be interesting things to grow, besides possessing solid virtues not given to flowers'.[683] This interest in growing vegetables is characterised by her husband as 'eccentric', which Elizabeth shrugs off with,

> Very well, I suppose I am eccentric, since even my husband says so: but if my eccentricities are of such a practical nature as to result later in the biggest cauliflowers and tenderest lettuce … why then he ought to be the first to rise up and call me blessed.[684]

Instead, von Arnim disrupts those categories of gender and associations with flowers to create a representation of femininity whose characteristics of resilience and strength are deemed to be antithetical to conventional ideas of femininity. Almost every page of the book includes some reference to the disruption of conventional femininities. When Elizabeth gets dirt on her face and then uses a handkerchief to rub it off, suddenly impatient with both the cleaning and the use of the object she

[682] O'Connell, R. (2017) 'Love Scenes and Garden Plots: form and femininity in Elizabeth von Arnim's Elizabeth and her German Garden'. Available at: https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Love-Scenes-and-Garden-Plots p.12.
[683] Arnim, E. von (1898) *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, Dead Dodo Vintage, electronic, p.134.
[684] Arnim, E. von (1898) ibid, p.134.

exclaims '"Away with you", I cried, away with you, symbol of conventionality, of slavery, of pandering to a desire to please – away with you, miserable little lace-edged rag!"'.[685] Feminine associations of cleanliness with purity and innocence, characterised as female virtues and embodied in the language of flowers, are upended by Elizabeth.

Notions of impending chaos and disruption and the need for carefully maintained boundaries, metaphorical and physical, underpin my discussion and I have referred to the work of McDowell and Sharp[686] who have provided shrewd commentary on the relationship between gender and appropriate space, while from an anthropological perspective Douglas[687] has emphasized the importance of social practices which reinforce spatial distinctions. The alignment of women with nature, with its (and therefore women's) perceived tendency towards disorder, informs much of the discourse around women and the necessity for containment. By disrupting the association of women with nature and the natural, notions of floral femininity and those conventional alignments of the female as passive, unobtrusive and discreet, the women represented in this study challenge the conventional discourse. Mrs. Talmann and Mrs. Herbert provide a stark contrast to ideas of emotional and disorderly women. The two women have planned their strategy well in advance and execute it with cold-blooded precision. The work of Helen in the Assam garden and Elizabeth's in her German garden are carried out according to organised lists of tasks, Jane Loudon's encyclopaedic horticultural works are similarly divergent.

The different experiences which men and women bring to the garden is highlighted in *The Assam Garden*. Through the creation of a space which is a reminder of perhaps better times in India for

[685] Arnim, E. von (1898) ibid, p.44.
[686] McDowell, L. and Sharp. J.P. eds. (1997) *Space, Gender and Knowledge. Feminist Readings*, Arnold, London.
[687] Douglas, M. (1966) *Purity and Danger*, Routledge

Helen's husband the garden is an exercise in nostalgia and affirms his selfhood. For Arthur the garden is an extension of his masculinity, but for Helen it is a space of ambiguity and one in which she does not belong. There are echoes here of private and public space, although this is not a characteristic usually associated with the garden, the fact that the garden is her husband's means it assumes this quality/property. For Helen, however, the garden is a struggle, both mentally and physically and when she does finally succeed in completing it for inclusion in the magazine, she ultimately has to leave it.

I suggest that while issues of gender have influenced our understanding of art through the work of Pollock, Nochlin and others, the study of the representation of women in the garden has not been explored using a similar frame of reference. Contemporary discourses which focus on the development of self-confidence for women, identified by Gill and Orgad, indicate how lack of agency and inability continue to underpin women's experience and McRobbie's comment that, '… relations of power are … made and re-made within texts of enjoyment and rituals of relaxation …'[688] suggests that representations of women which challenge dominant discourses remain of critical importance. My study also provides the foundation for future cross- disciplinary research examining the ways in which the space of the garden may be used to undermine conventional representations of women.

The garden presented in this thesis is not a conservative space, immortalised in the BBC television series *The Good Life*[689] and fixed in memory in a kind of permanent stasis. The identification of gardens with rural spaces, themselves viewed as repositories of tradition and conservative values, find their reflection in the opposition of the progressiveness of the town and described by Williams in *The*

[688] McRobbie, A. (2004) Post-feminism and popular culture, *Feminist Media Studies*, 4:3, 255-264. Available at: DOI: 10.1080/1468077042000309937. P.262. Acc. 25.05.2023

[689] The series was aired on BBC1 from April 1975 to June 1978 and was one of the most popular series of the time.

Country and The City.[690] For the women in my study the garden is never simply a *hortus conclusus* that circumscribes femininity within specific defined boundaries. Rather it is a space which enables alternative modes of femininity to be experimented with, proposed, performed. The garden in the texts selected for study provides a space for the women to actively engage with the world outside its confines; it provides a space for both self- observation and self- production. In representing women in the garden in ways which subvert dominant modes of representation, the garden acts as a space for the construction of meaning, capable of de-stabilizing existing tropes and challenging prevailing ways of seeing.

[690] Williams, R. (1973) *The Country and the City*, London: Chatto & Windus.

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