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

Building on scholarship from folklore and literature, everyday autobiography, women's traditional culture, and women's garden history, this thesis examines how Marion Cran documented home and garden experiences in Surrey and Kent through a series of gardening books she wrote between 1913 and 1941. -- While providing useful information on plants and gardening practices, Cran’s writing was fragmented and tangential: her books were filled with planting references suffused with culinary tips and recipes and traditional lore that evoked meaning and "encoded memories" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1989). Although Cran was fascinated by garden styles indicative of the period, such as the English cottage garden, she also valued individuality in garden making, and implored her readers to create gardens that fulfilled their own expectations. -- In her everyday autobiographies, Cran revealed her innermost thoughts based on her own experiences and what she learned through her observations of and interactions with fellow gardeners and homemakers. Cran inspired a predominantly female audience to create and maintain homes and gardens that benefitted their own lives as well as those of their families and members of their communities. In direct correlation, women corresponded with Cran, confiding to her their own home and garden experiences whether they lived in England or South Africa. While exploring Cran’s appeal to women readers, this thesis focuses on several themes: community and fellowship in gardening practices, implicit coding, female performativity, and women’s sense of empowerment through creating a home and garden. -- This thesis examines not only how Cran and her books inspired gardeners and homemakers’ lives during the interwar period, but also, it recognizes her relevance to contemporary readers and present-day gardeners. Not unlike many gardeners today, Cran was committed to natural gardening practices and growing her own produce. Cran can be found not only between the pages of her books, but through the existence of her former home and garden, “Coggers,” in Kent. By preserving Coggers and welcoming visitors, the current residents have fostered a growing community of readers and gardeners whose enthusiasm in Cran and her writings will continue her legacy for future generations. Marion Cran and her garden literature offer folklorists an alternative resource through which to understand and appreciate how women expressed themselves creatively through common, everyday tasks in homes and gardens of the early twentieth century.
years old at the start of The Secret Garden. Susan suggests that Archibald come home and says that he would be happy if he did so. She also says that she thinks his wife would have wanted him to return at this point in time. Immediately after reading the letter and with the dream still in his mind, Archibald orders his servant to prepare for their return to England. You are going to read a newspaper article about trees and leaves. For questions 31-36, choose the answer (A, B, C or D) which you think fits best according to the text. Those brilliant autumn outfits may be saving trees. As trees across the northern areas of the globe turn gold and crimson, scientists are debating exactly what these colours are for. The scientists do agree on one thing: the colours are for something. That represents a major shift in thinking. For decades, textbooks claimed that autumn colours were just a by-product of dying leaves. 'I had always assumed that autumn leaves were