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978-0-521-76865-8 - Women, Literature, and the Domesticated Landscape: England's

Disciples of Flora, 1780-1870

Judith W. Page and Elise L. Smith

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WOMEN, LITERATURE, AND THE DOMESTICATED LANDSCAPE

Combining an analysis of literature and art and including more than seventy illustrations, this book contends that the “domesticated landscape” is a key to understanding women’s complex negotiation of private and public life in a period of revolution and transition, 1780–1870. As more women became engaged in horticultural and botanical pursuits, the meaning of gardens – recognized here both as actual sites of pleasure and labor and as conceptual or symbolic spaces – became more complex. Women writers and artists often used the subject matter of gardens to educate their readers, to enter into political and cultural debates, and to signal moments of intellectual and spiritual insight. Gardens functioned as a protected vantage point for women, providing them with a new language and authority to negotiate between domestic space and the larger world. Although this more expansive form of domesticity still highlighted the virtues associated with the feminized home, it also promised a wider field of action, re-centering domesticity outward.

JUDITH W. PAGE is Professor of English and was the 2009–10 Waldo W. Neikirk Term Professor of Arts and Sciences at the University of Florida, where she also serves as Interim Director of the Center for Women’s Studies and Gender Research.

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Nineteenth-century British literature and culture have been rich fields for interdisciplinary studies. Since the turn of the twentieth century, scholars and critics have tracked the intersections and tensions between Victorian literature and the visual arts, politics, social organization, economic life, technical innovations, scientific thought – in short, culture in its broadest sense. In recent years, theoretical challenges and historiographical shifts have unsettled the assumptions of previous scholarly synthesis and called into question the terms of older debates. Whereas the tendency in much past literary critical interpretation was to use the metaphor of culture as “background,” feminist, Foucauldian, and other analyses have employed more dynamic models that raise questions of power and of circulation. Such developments have reanimated the field. This series aims to accommodate and promote the most interesting work being undertaken on the frontiers of the field of nineteenth-century literary studies: work which intersects fruitfully with other fields of study such as history, or literary theory, or the history of science. Comparative as well as interdisciplinary approaches are welcomed.

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In memory of our mothers,

Mollie Marcus Wallick

1926–2008

Elise Lawton Isleib

1924–1992,

and

with gratitude to our daughters by birth and marriage,

Rebekah, Hannah, Katy, and Kelly

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Acknowledgements

It is hard to pinpoint exactly when and how this project began. Long-time colleagues and friends, we also share a common passion for the garden – the real gardens that we have both created, the gardens of our respective childhood memories, and gardens as they come to life in a wide range of visual arts and garden writing. Although our homes are in the decidedly intemperate American South – in Mississippi and Florida – we have both aspired to the informal English style of mixed borders. As we focused on our shared fascination with nineteenth-century England and women as creative agents in art and literature, our project began to take shape. We hope that our introduction, and of course the book itself, will reveal the range of scholars who have inspired and influenced our work. We also owe a huge debt to many institutions and people for supporting us along the way and making our collaboration possible.

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its completion. For their love and encouragement, and in recognition of the influence they have had on our work, we dedicate this book to the women in our families: to our daughters by birth and marriage, Rebekah, Hannah, Katy, and Kelly, and to the memory of our mothers, Mollie Marcus Wallick and Elise Lawton Isleib. The writers and artists that we study in the following chapters understood the crucial role that mother-mentors have in the cultivation of their children's future, and our dedication acknowledges the power of that role in making all of our gardens – and this book – a reality.

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