A COMPARISON OF THE BOTANICAL ART OF MARY DELANY (1700-1788), KATHERINE PLUNKET (1820-1932) AND WENDY WALSH (1915-)

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to compare three botanical illustrators representing the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, respectively, each with Irish connections, from the aspects of observation, botanical accuracy and artistic ability.

The chosen illustrators are :

A. Mary Delany (1700-1788)

Beginning in the 1770s, she invented a form of botanical representation by means of collages made from pieces of coloured paper.

B. Katherine Plunket (1820-1932)

This lady painted circa 1000 small botanical watercolours which are incorporated in one book held by the National Botanical Gardens, known as 'The Plunket Volume'.

C. Wendy Walsh (1915-)

Mrs. Walsh created the botanical illustrations for the two volumes of 'An Irish Florilegium' and other published botanical work.

It is intended to survey the life and work of each of the artists concerned including a detailed analysis of a number of typical illustrations.

In conclusion, it is intended to examine and contrast the botanical work of the artists in question and to assess their contributions to the field of botanical art.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The objectives of most botanical writers are to provide students with a reliable means of accurately identifying plants with their division into different classes and categories and their distribution within a locality. Their history, description, behaviour, characteristics and uses would usually be included.

In preparing illustrations of plants, the objectives of the different botanical artists would, of course, have considerable variations and emphasis depending on their priorities (including relations with the botanical writers) and the prevailing environment. Almost all such artists would aim to create strictly botanically accurate, scientific illustrations, coinciding with the text for identification purposes.

For other artists, the aim would be a decorative function to accompany text, i.e. floral borders for pages. Another category may be concerned with producing attractive pictures with less regard for botanical accuracy.

In the long term, the illustrator's work was governed also by the environmental scene, including standards of culture and the demand for his work, i.e.

illustrations of foreign plants brought by explorers from abroad.

Furthermore, the artists work was to a major extent controlled by the materials at hand; paper pencils, pens, ink and colours. To qualify this, the remarkable work of medieval artists, bearing in mind the state of knowledge and equipment available, was nothing short of incredible and compares favourably with modern illustrators despite the latters advantages.

Widely distributed printed reproductions with ever more life-like illustrations have stimulated demand for artisitic work of the highest standards.

For the purposes of this study, it was decided to examine the work of three botanical illustrators with Irish connections, each a representative of their time, in order to throw some new light on the skills and stylistic approaches of the past.

It is intended to discuss, in the second chapter, the historical background of botanical illustration from the Renaissance onwards. I also wish to trace the technical developments of printing, particularly in its relationship to the publication of books with botanical illustrations.

This chapter also includes an outline of the developmental progress in production of herbals, florilegiums and botanical books, as well as the steps in developments in the cataloguing of the Irish Flora.

In Chapter Three the life and artistic career of Mrs. Mary Delany (1700-1788) is outlined. Her discovery of the method of creating paper mosaics (or collages) is described in detail and its importance assessed. The probable influences on her work, particularly of George D.Ehret, are also described as well as her close associations with eminent botanists of the time.

Chapter Four will cover the well known Plunket Volume, which is held by the National Botanical Gardens, Glasnevin, which contains the work of the two Plunket sisters of Co. Louth. The best known sister is Katherine (1820-1932) who, in addition to attaining 112 years of age, left the remarkable collection of 1,200 botanical paintings mainly completed by herself. Unfortunately, none of their illustrations have yet been published. No details of their art education are known but it seems that the two ladies and their family were keenly interested in plants.

Chapter Five reviews the career of Mrs. Wendy Walsh (1915-). Thankfully, this lady still continues to paint and the information contained in

this chapter was obtained from her personally. I have mentioned, particularly, her meticulous procedures for obtaining exact proportions and colours for the plant illustrations. This lady was educated by a governess and was a self-taught artist. It was interesting to discover also that the development of her artistic talents accelerated through residence in Japan and the Pacific Islands.

Following Chapters Five Three and Four, a detailed review and illustration of selected works of the respective artists is provided.

Finally, in the conclusion the work of the three will be assessed, compared and contrasted in light of the background of each.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

From the earliest times illustrations were used to embellish important manuscripts and books. In these, representations of plants were often used but there was no particular concern with botanical accuracy.

It is accepted that the first known studies in Europe where the botanical aspects of plants were illustrated, were those of Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) and Durer (1471-1528) (see illustrations 1 and 2).

The next significant step forward was the discovery in Germany of printing by Gutenburg (c.1450). His first printed book, a Bible was completed in 1455. From this period onwards book printing expanded with the inclusion in many of woodcut illustrations. Woodcuts were carved on a block of close-grained wood. The parts intended to print were left standing and the white parts were cut away.

Modern botanical drawing commenced in sixteenth century Germany in printed books known as 'Herbals'. One of the best known was Brunfel's Herbarium Vivae Eicones (Living Pictures of Plants), illustrated by Hans Weiditz. It was outstanding because the woodcuts

Illustration 1 : Flower Studies by Leonardo da Vinci

Illustration 2 :The Great Grass-plot by Albrecht Durer

were carried out realistically and directly from nature. These herbals were used to identify medicinal herbs and to describe their uses.

Explorers returned home from foreign lands with new and different varieties of plants, which were then recorded by botanical artists, from a scientific point of view.

With technical improvements in printing such as copper etching and engraving, techniques that allowed for finer details in plant illustrations, many illustrated books were being produced.

As a result of these advances, a new type of flower book, the Florilegiums, began to be produced. A Florilegium is an anthology of flowers which are drawn for their beauty rather than for their utility or structure. These were attractive to a wider audience who used the illustrations as designs for embroidery and for decorating ceramics and glass.

Previous to the eighteenth century, botanicals and florilegiums were catalogued alphabetically. Linnaeus (b.1707), a well known botanist, introduced the systems of classifying plants by genus and species, while completely revising their names and descriptions.

Another major scientific advance was the invention of the microscope which enabled botanists to investigate plant life in minute detail.

In 1784 William Curtis founded the London Botanical Magazine which published authoritative studies of botany with black and white illustrations. The Irish botanical artist, William Kilburn (1745-1818) contributed to the magazine.

Probably the first attempt at recording the Irish flora was Caleb Threlkeld's work Synopsis Stirpium Hibernicum, published in 1726.

Walter Wade was the next to try and record and catalogue the Irish flora. His book, Flora Dublinensis, 1788-1789, was followed in 1804 by his articles, 'Plantae Rariores' in Hibernia, but these were confined to Kerry and Connemara.

John Templeton (1766-1825) also attempted a natural history of Ireland, Flora Hibernica, but due to ill health this was never completed. Accordingly it seems that a comprehensive catalogue was still awaited at the close of the eighteenth century.

It is considered that the nineteenth century brought the climax of botanical books with illustrations produced by artists.

This century also brought to light many technical developments to floral illustration, firstly in the existing copper plate process, including stipple engraving, mezzotint and aquatint. These developments led to significant improvement of reproduction.

Probably the major discovery was lithography in 1797 by Aloys Senefelder based on the use of oil and water. Oil based ink is used to draw on smooth porous limestone slabs. The ink is fixed and when the paper is applied to the stone, the inked image is picked up.

In this century some of the most beautiful plant publications were, Dr. Thornton's Temple of Flora, illustrated by Redoute (1759-1840) (see illustration 3) which was a tribute to Linnaeus and Flora Graeca (circa 1800) illustrated by Ferdinand Bauer (d.1826) with one thousand illustrations.

In Ireland an Ordnance Office Survey in 1824 included local Irish Flora with a 'Catalogue of Plant Paintings', by George du Noyer (1817-1869).

A Scotsman, James Townsend Mackay (1775-1815) published 'Flora Hibernica' in association with an Irish woman Ellen Hutchins (1785-1815), who researched with Mackay.

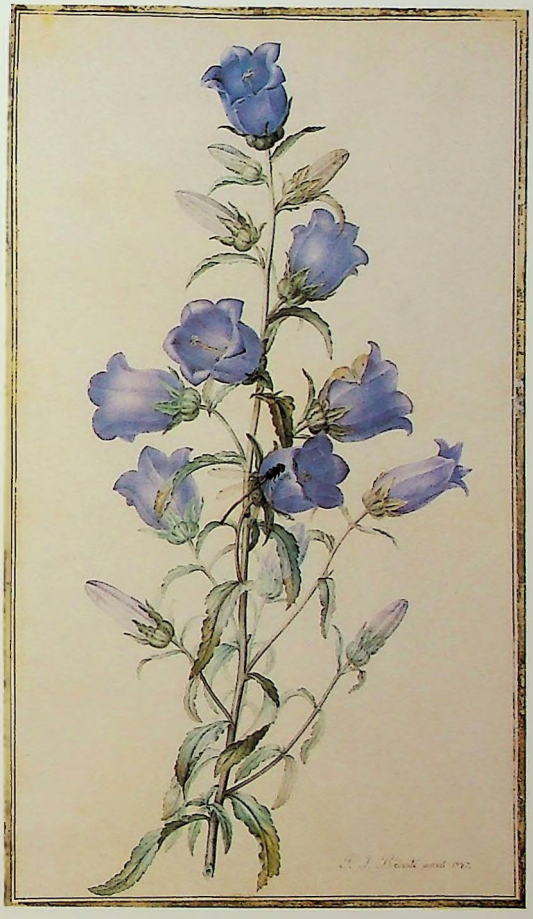

Illustration 3 : Canterbury Bell by Pierre J. Redoute

Katherine Plunket (1820-1932) whose collection is held at the Botanical Gardens contains c.1200 small botanically accurate watercolours of plants, including many Irish specimens.

CHAPTER 3

MARY DELANY **1700-1788**

Her Background

At eighteen years of age, Mary Granville, who was born in Coulston, Wiltshire in 1700, married well off sixty year old Alexander Pendarves. She then went to live an unhappy married life in Cornwall. In 1724, Alexander died leaving her with freedom and only a small income.

In 1731 Mary made her first visit to Ireland where she made acquaintance with Dr. Patrick Delany. About twelve years later, in 1743, after developments unknown to us, Mary received a letter of proposal from the then widowed Dr. Delany and they were married in June of that year (it is believed, against her family's wishes).

A year later they moved to Delville, Dr. Delany's property in Glasnevin, near Dublin. As Dr. Delany was Dean of Down, they spent some of their time in Downpatrick, Co. Down. Mary spent some of her happiest years in Ireland but on Dr. Delany's death in 1768, she returned to England.

Dr. Delany was an Irish Clergyman of 'humble origin' and modest means. Their marriage strengthened Mary's creativity as her husband encouraged her

painting, shellwork, gardening and needlework, resulting in surges of activity in various media (in many where the flower was the basic theme).

> *This intensely happy and creative marriage prepared the way for a new artistic venture in later life.....her real pleasure.....flourished in the warmth of her husband's admiration* (Diary of Mary Delany).

Mary wrote that:

> *His approving of my works and encouraging me to go on, keep up my relish to them, and make them more delightful to me than assembly, play or an opera would be with without he shared them with me* (Diary of Mary Delany).

Gardens and their layouts were one of Mary Delany's main interests. When she moved to Delville she was enchanted by Dr. Delany's new style of gardening (influenced by his friend, Alexander Pope's garden at Twickenham), leaving the old formal Dutch style for a wilder more natural garden.

Mary Delany's fulfilment at Delville was summed up by her notes in her diary in 1750, 'D.D. (Dr. Delany, as she called him in her diaries) up to his chin hay-making on the lawn under my closet and the whole house fragrant with the smell of it.....the garden is Paradaisical'.

Apparently, almost immediately after her husband's death, Mary was invited by her friend, the Dowager Duchess of Portland, to visit Bulstrode, the Duchess' home. Mrs. Delany stayed there for six months of each year for the rest of her life, generally from Spring to Autumn.

In 1788, after a bout of pneumonia she died in her London home on 15 April.

In 1795, the Dublin Society made a bid to buy Dr. Delany's gardens and land in Glasnevin for use as a site for the National Botanical Gardens but was unsuccessful.

Her Interests

Mrs. Delany was very interested in botany and made a practice of examining many plants in detail.

Her friendship with the Duchess of Portland allowed her to meet the great botanists, horticulturists and botanical artists of her time. They were guided in their botanical studies by the Portland family chaplain, Reverend John Lightfoot, one of the most distinguished botanists of the century.

Of those with whom she became friendly, George Dionysius Ehret is thought by some to be the best

Illustration 4 : Magnolia, Watercolour and gouache on vellum by George D. Ehret

botanical artist, perhaps even of all time (see illustration 4). The Duchess of Portland was one of his patrons and he visited the two ladies at Bulstrode. Ehret was married to the sister in-law of Philip Miller, who became one of the great botanical horticulturists of the eighteenth century. Miller also visited Bulstrode while Mary Delany was staying there. She made use of his book, Gardening Kalender, for her own gardens.

In 1771 a further two eminent botanists stayed at Bulstrode: Joseph Banks (1743-1820) and Daniel Solander (1733-1782). Mary Delany and the Duchess visited Banks' house in London to view Banks' findings of plants from his foreign explorations with Captain Cook's fleet. Cook gave Botany Bay its name due to the amount of botanical specimens collected there.

Mary Delany was also friendly with Lord (once Prime Minister) and Lady Bute. Lord Bute was a keen horticulturist. Mrs. Delany portrayed flowers in her paper mosaics (illustration 5) at their home in Luton.

The King and Queen who were also interested in botany visited Bulstrode often. Their Majesties requested Kew Gardens to send rare specimens to Mary to imitate in cut paper. Joseph Banks, who had been in charge of the Gardens since 1772, sent her seventy-

Illustration 5 : Bloody Cranesbill by Mary Delany

(her first paper mosaic)

four plants and the Chelsea Physic garden also sent her material to copy.

Her Art

Mary Delany showed promise in drawing and painting from an early age. When she was eight, a fellow pupil in her school admired the flowers and birds that Mary had cut out so much that the friend, Lady Jane Douglas, took them home and framed them (Hayden, 1980, 15).

She was taught painting and drawing by Joseph Goupy and Bernard Lens and was possibly influenced by her friend William Hogarth. She continued drawing and painting for the rest of her life.

Another obvious influence on her work was Rupert Barber (1736-1772). When Mary lived in Delville, this painter and miniaturist lived in a house at the end of the Delville garden. Mary was interested in his work and eager to promote his progress. She recommended him to her friends for portrait painting; he also painted her portrait. Another portrait painted of her by John Opie which hangs in Windsor Castle, was commissioned by George III for Queen Charlotte's bedchamber. The Countess of Bute also had a painting of Mrs. Delany with a frame designed by Horace Walpole, who first published her 'new form of art'.

Illustration 6 : Mrs. Delany by John Opie, with the frame designed by Horace Walpole. The portrait now hangs at Beningborough Hall, near York.

Sir Joshua Reynolds was also an admirer of her flower collages.

> *Over a period of thirty years, Mary Delany (1700- 1788) sketched and recorded 'wild and pretty places'. These drawings, some of which consist of loose drawings are now in the National Gallery of Ireland's collection. They indicate a style which could be highly competent and pictorial, revealing the influence of such well-known artists as William Hogarth and Francis Haymann* (Butler, 1990, 33-34).

A close examination of her drawings reveal that she made every attempt at accuracy in her botanical work. Her line drawing was most confident.

Her landscape drawings were outstanding as regards accuracy and seemed to often produce a three dimensional effect. The curved flowing shapes of trees created the effect of swaying movement. She had a style of her own.

She also produced copies in oil of works by the old masters.

Her Methods - Scissor Work

Mary Delany's 'mosaics' (as she called them) or paper collages of plants and flowers were made up of coloured paper cut into shapes of petals, leaves,

stems and other parts. These were then assembled and glued in place on black card. Sometimes, watercolours were added for more depth of colour. Magnification is required to show their extraordinary fine details.

She created tonal effects by using slightly different shades of coloured paper in layers over each other, which also added a three dimensional effect.

She mounted her flowers on a backing of thin shiny black paper but in 1774, changed to using a matt paper, which she obtained from a new mill in Hampshire and stained black with Indian ink. While the sizes of the background page varied, the plants were always cut life size, judged by her eye.

The paper she used for making the plants was 'procured ' in London from sailors who had brought it from China. She also obtained coloured paper from 'paper stainers' (wall paper manufacturers) whose colour had run. Occasionally, she dyed paper herself with watercolours in order to obtain an exact tone which she needed.

It is thought that the glue she used was made from egg white or flour and water. A laboratory test on one picture detected a starch based agent.

Mary initialled each picture with her initials cut from paper in varying styles of lettering.

The early collages were also numbered on the reverse but after the first fifty-two she began to date her work.

Usually she also indicated where she made the collage, normally St. James's Place (her London home), or Bulstrode. Sometimes she made notes of visitors who were present at the time.

During the first year after 1772, when she began making the collages, she created over one hundred botanical pictures.

At this stage her scissors skills had reached their peak, as had her selection of colours and she rarely needed to add to her pictures with paint.

Mary's friend, Mrs. Boscawen, wrote, 'is this Indian paper good for anything to you, my dear madam, it is real Indian, I have half a dozen sheets more if this would be of any use to you' (Hayden, 1980).

Some of her pictures were completed in other locations, ie. in Sir Charles Wagner's garden in 1733 (see illustration 7, Magnolia Grandiflora) indicating

Illustration 7 : Magnolia Grandiflora by Mary Delany

that she took her cutting scissors and paper with her on visits to her friends.

On a few of the collages a real dried leaf or flower part was also glued on as part of the collage ie. Physalis,Winter Cherry (see illustration 8).

Mary did paper cutting work throughout her lifetime. She also cut silhouettes of people and made pictures of birds. She cut out an alphabet for her niece and in 1752 made and painted a miniature set of playing cards.

When Mary was at Bulstrode she began her 'paper mosaics'. In 1772, she wrote to her niece, Mary Port, 'I have invented a new way of imitating flowers. I'll send you, next time I write, one for a sample' (Hayden, 1980).

She also wrote that her work was to be an 'employment and amusement to supply the loss of those (including her late husband, Dr. Delany), that had been formerly delightful to me', (Diaries-Hayden, 1980, see illustration 9).

Illustration 8 : Physalis Winter Cherry by Mary Delany

Illustration 9 : Drawings of Flowers by Mary Delany as designs for her embroidery

It is probable that Mary Delany dissected each plant to examine its structure and anatomical details.

She wrote that her 'herbal', (her collection of pictures) was in imitation of a 'Hortus Siccus' which was a collection of dried flowers.

In her imitation of 'Mespilus Piracantha', her botanical eye for detail can be seen (see illustration 10). She has also included collages of both flowers and berries of a plant on the same page. She included the bulb and its flower of the 'Meadow Saffron'.

The dating of most of her pictures was very important to botanists. They included a number of the 7,000 plants brought back to Britain by eighteenth century explorers as proof of reaching the unexplored world.

Banks judged Mary's work as botanically accurate as each plant was easily identifiable. She took extra care to portray the plants accurately, even to the extent of cutting out the exact number of stamens and styles. She classified the plants using the Linnaean sexual system, which was recorded on the back of most of the collages.

Illustration 10 : Meadow Saffron by Mary Delany

CHAPTER 4

KATHERINE PLUNKET 1820-1932

Her family

Katherine Plunket was born in Kilsaran, Co. Louth. Her father was the Reverend Thomas Plunket, Bishop of Tuam, Kilalla and Achonry, and Dean of Down (1831-1839); he also became Baron Plunket in 1854. In 1819 Thomas Plunket was married to Louisa Jane Foster, daughter of John W. Foster (1740-1828) thus establishing the connection with the Foster family.

John Foster was educated first at Drogheda Grammar School and then studied Law at Trinity College. In 1761 he entered the Irish House of Commons as a member for Dunleer. He was a leading member of the Dublin Society and co-founder of the Farming Society. He instigated the setting up of the Botanical Gardens in 1795.

Katherine's younger sister, Frederica, who also worked on the Plunket Volume, died in London in February 1886 and it is thought that she was born between 1823 and 1841.

Her Travels

Many of the paintings in the Plunket Volume show the following dates: 1886, 1887, 1888, 1889, 1890,

1891, 1892, 1893 and 1894. Where they were painted was also recorded.

Frederica died in 1886 so these works dated after this time may be attributed to Katherine. Also, the countries in which Katherine Plunket spent time during the years indicated can be deduced:

1888 - Ireland, England, Italy and France
1887 - Ireland, England, Switzerland, France, Spain and Italy
1888 - Ireland, England and Germany
1889 - Ireland, England, Germany and France
1890 - Ireland, England, France, Switzerland and Italy
1891 - Ireland, England, Germany, Italy, France and Scotland
1892 - England, Switzerland, France, Italy and Scotland
1893 - France
1894 - Switzerland, Italy, England, Germany, Austria and France

Between 1881 and 1886 Katherine exhibited her landscapes in London (Johnson and Greutzner, 1970) when she was staying there and probably Frederica's death in London in 1886 encouraged Katherine to travel abroad more frequently.

In a letter of 1903 from Katherine to Professor Thomas Johnson (Professor of Botany in the College of Science) donating the Plunket Volume to the Museum, her address appeared as, 64 Eaton Place, London SW.

She died on 14 of October, 1932 in her home, Ballymascanlon House, Co. Louth.

Her Gardens

Both Anthony Foster (1705-1779) and his son, John Foster, were concerned with promoting agricultural improvement in Ireland. They lived at Collon, Co. Louth, where they had a garden containing many rare plants and trees. Anthony Foster had built a range of glasshouses in 1763 for growing grapes and pineapples. John Foster's passion was collecting exotic trees and shrubs.

It was recorded that he possessed the important botanical books of his day:

Carl Linnaeus, Genera Plantarum
Colin Milnes, A Botanical Dictionary
William Curtis, Flora Londinensis
Philip Millers, Gardener's Dictionary
Duhamel du Monceau, Traite des Arbes et Arbustes
(Nelson and McCracken, 1987).

When the Botanical Gardens were formed in Glasnevin in 1795, its main aim was to promote a scientific knowledge in agriculture. This showed the strong influence of Foster who was largely responsible for the plans of the gardens.

The Irish Times appreciation of Katherine Plunket after her death, talked of her 'extensive gardens at

her home in Ballymascanlon House' and notes that 'she was extremely fond of flowers and every year sent her best blooms for competition to Dundalk show'. In 1931 when she was 111 years old, she won the 'Fortescue Bowl' outright.

THE PLUNKET VOLUME

1. Description

In 1903, when she was eighty-three, Katherine Plunket donated the bound collection of illustrations of Irish and Foreign plants (since named the 'Plunket Volume') to the Royal College of Science, Dublin in order to have its 'educational value appreciated and its safe keeping assured'(Scannell and Houston, 1985).

The following letters accompanied the donation and are also preserved in the National Botanical Gardens with the Plunket Volume:

64 Eaton Place
(London) SW

21st May 1903

Dear Mr Johnson

I have sent the book of flowers painted from Nature to you to-day. If you decide that they are worth acceptance by the Royal College of Science, I shall be pleased to present them to a College in my own Country, rather than to any Botanical Society in England. In that

case I would send you an inscription to be placed in the book. If you should however not think the collection suitable for the Dublin College, will you kindly have the book carefully packed and returned to me here.

I remain
Yours truly
Katherine Plunket

Dear Sir

I send you the inscription for the book of flowers. Will you kindly have it put on one of the front pages. If I may make a suggestion, I think it would preserve the binding very much if you could have a box or case made and lined with cloth or velvet to hold the book. I am sorry I had not time to get this done myself but would pay for getting it if necessary. I hope to call at the Museum and see the book in the course of the Autumn.

I remain
Yours truly
Katherine Plunket

The book contains 157 folio art-paper pages. On 150 of these are mounted eight paintings, arranged in two rows of four. Each painting (12.5cm by 9cm) is on tinted cream, grey or blue light card.

The book (37.6 by 50.7 by 10cm) is bound in emerald green Morocco. The covers are finely decorated with gold tooling. The spine with the title has six decorated panels separated by horizontal bands. The binding is that of Hatchard, 187 Picadilly, London. The mahogany case for the book is lined with green velvet.

There is an inscription in large black Gothic print which was placed inside the cover. It reads, 'Wild Flowers, painted from Nature, by the Honble Frederica Plunket, Honble Katherine Plunket', presented by them to the Dublin Museum of Science and Art.

2. Contents

Beneath each picture, in Katherine Plunket's own hand is the botanical name of each plant. The reverse of each page bears the names of the family/families represented.

The order of species follows that of Bentham's Handbook of the British Flora (1858 and 1865), from Ranunculaceae (the buttercup family) to Alismataceae (water plantain). There are fifty-seven families.

The genera and species were in alphabetical order within each family. Only petaloid plants are included in the Volume (no grasses, rushes or sedges); some cultivated varieties are included (anemone sylvestris grandiflora' and viscaria vulgaris 'splendens').

The artwork was not signed; some only are dated.

The drawings have been deemed botanically accurate, although there are neither sections nor anatomical details. Still, the character of species is well conveyed and readily recognisable (Scannell and Houston, 1985).

Some of the small species are depicted in their surroundings while flowers and upper foliage only of the larger plants are shown.

The book is not categorised and does not contain an index but the National Botanical Gardens have provided a catalogue of the paintings, along with some biographical notes (Scannell and Houston, 1985).

Scannell and Houston made the following comments in the catalogue:

> *The quality of the work varies. It is rich in colour but it is often disappointing in that a restricted palette was used and subjects are treated as objects lacking roundness. There is monotony in the colouring of leaves and foliage, venation is indicated by thin lines in a contrasting shade and there is little play of light on flat surfaces. Stamens are inserted in thick impasto to achieve a raised effect. Species with flowers of brilliant hues, poppies, violets and others are well served.....the paintings are striking and species are readily recognisable* (Scannell and Houston,1985).

CHAPTER 5

WENDY WALSH

Her Background

Mrs. Wendy F. Walsh was born Wendy Storey in Westmoreland, England in April 1915 (see illustration 11).

Her father had an Oil Cloth Mill in Lancashire and her mother was a member of the Wright family from that county.

Wendy Walsh and her sister were both educated in their younger years by a governess. She became an avid reader, which was to be her main educational medium for the rest of her life. She was interested in drawing and painting from her childhood when she drew animals and flowers.

When Wendy Walsh was twenty-six, she married a British army officer (a liaison officer with the American forces) in 1941 and after World War 2 he was appointed to Japan. Mrs. Walsh followed with their two children in 1947.

It was in Japan that she became seriously interested in art when she became friendly with a Japanese artist. He painted flowers and taught her to paint with black Chinese inks, a method she is still

Illustration 11 : Wendy Walsh

using. She feels that Chinese and Japanese watercolours have been an important influence on her work.

She lived in Japan for about a year and then moved with her family to Singapore where her third child, a son, was born. With her husband she stayed for lengthy periods in various Pacific Islands.

In 1958, her husband took up the post as Agent at Trinity College, Dublin, and the family moved to their present home in Lusk, Co. Dublin. In 1968, when over fifty years of age, Mrs. Walsh began to paint full time after the marriage of her eldest daughter.

Her Methods

Mrs. Walsh considers that only the highest quality materials should be used for botanical illustration. She preferred to work on 'Green's' handmade paper until it went out of production. She now uses Fabrian's Hot Press, a fine grained heavy paper ideal for fine details.

The subject of the paintings dictate the weight of the paper used and subjects requiring large areas of wash are painted on heavy paper, which is stretched

on board to avoid warping. Paintings are usually lifesize.

She begins by drawing loose guidelines with a finely sharpened HB pencil. Into this she draws finer details also in pencil. To the detailed pencil drawing she adds the colour. The finest details are finished in watercolour without pen, ink or pencil additions.

Mrs. Walsh's botanical drawings are mainly in watercolour or Chinese inks, using finer pure sable paint brushes. She claims she is not an 'oil painter' but likes to paint in oils occasionally.

She has been concentrating on botanical illustrations for the last twenty years and now can judge measurements very accurately by eye, and only occasionally uses a ruler or dividers.

Mrs. Walsh differs from other botanical artists in that she paints with a wet brush, while the others usually paint with dry brushes. She takes the sections of plants to her home where she paints them.

She has strict rules about matching colours of plants to paints. Colours are logically calculated, by using a colour grid which is made up of one inch squares (Ex. Art of Colour, Johannes Itten, Reinhold

Press, New York, 1961). The colours of the spectrum are arranged vertically with black and white added horizontally, so that each colour is there in its palest and darkest form. Written underneath each square are the proportions of each colour mixture, required to produce a certain tone.

Mrs. Walsh feels it is essential to check the grid to ensure accuracy. Before touching the picture with the mixed watercolour, she tests it on a scrap of paper and matches it with the plant.

From the beginning, each painting may take up to two weeks to complete, reflecting the length of time and precision required for such high standards.

Her Botany

Mrs Walsh has acquired an excellent knowledge of botany over the years. She has frequently worked with Dr. Nelson of the National Botanical Gardens with whom she worked in preparing the botanical notes in the volumes of the Irish Florilegium 1 and 2 (1983 and 1987) and the Irish Flower Garden (1984).

She is familiar with the 'old masters' such as Ehret and Redoute and particularly admires Bauer's Flora Graeca (c.1800).

Her modern favourite is the work of Margaret Mee, who spent 32 years in the Amazon area painting the flora and fauna there. The results of her work were published in her book, Flowers in the Amazon Forest (1990).

Mrs. Walsh is also interested in the botanical art in Johannesburg, where her daughter (whom she visits) now lives and she likes the work of Aureol Batton, Port Elizabeth (Flowers of Southern Africa, Frandson Publishers, 1986, Sandton). Mrs. Walsh saw Batton's original works in the Botanic Institute in Pretoria.

Another modern favourite is Sidney Parkinson, an English botanical artist, whose work she saw in the British Museum's botanic collection.

Mrs. Walsh has exhibited work in several countries and among awards she has received was the Gold Medal of the Royal Horticultural Society, London, in 1981.

She is also a founder member of the Society of Botanical Artists and a member of the Watercolour Society of Ireland.

Her commissions have included a flora and fauna series of postage stamps for the Irish Post Office and

also a similar set for the Gilbert and Ellice Islands (now Kiribati).

Mrs. Walsh has also worked on designs for textiles used by Sybil Connolly. One of these was based on the work of Mary Delany.

Mrs. Walsh's most prestigious works were:

AN IRISH FLORILEGIUM VOLUME 1

Author's Preface

> *The Plants included represent essentially our personal choice from the wide range available and for this reason we have used the Latin word 'Florilegium' in our title, meaning originally 'a gathering of flowers', its dictionary definition, 'an anthology or collection of choice extracts', accurately describes the contents of this miscellany.*

Wendy Walsh's 48 paintings in this volume were chosen to follow three themes:

a. The first group of paintings was of native plants.
b. The second group was of cultivars or garden plants.
c. The third group were foreign plants that were discovered by Irish explorers and botanists.

The first volume was acclaimed by horticulturists, botanists and artists. 'Once in a while', wrote Graham Stuart Thomas in Garden History:The Journal of Garden Society, 'there appears a superlative horticultural-botanical book, this is one of them'.

'A treasurable book', was Geoffrey Grigson's description in Country Life, while the Sunday Tribune in Dublin referred to it as 'a work of both scholarship and craftsmanship and ..... an important contribution to the study of botany and horticulture in Ireland' (Irish Florilegium 2, 1987).

The 48 precise studies of plants are accompanied by knowledgeable and readable texts by the Irish botanist Dr. Charles Nelson.

William Finlay wrote the foreword to Volume 1 :

> *The essence of an Irish Florilegium lies, however, in the rare quality of Wendy Walsh's paintings. There is so much a blending of truth and feeling in her work that each of her subjects has its particular appeal and we are very fortunate in having the opportunity to see such a fair collection so finely reproduced* (Irish Florilegium, Pb. 1983).

AN IRISH FLORILEGIUM VOLUME 2

The basic theme was the development of the Trinity College Botanical Gardens, the first of which was established three centuries ago in 1687.

In this volume, the foreword is written by W. A. Watts, Provost of Trinity College. He says:

> *I should like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to Wendy Walsh whose beautiful flower portraits have attracted much admiration in recent years.....Her first major collection appeared in an Irish Florilegium. We must be grateful that such talent is available to us in draughtsmanship and in freshness of colour.*

This volume was divided into the following themes:

a. The first 16 paintings are of native plants of Ireland or 'long established aliens' (Irish Florilegium, 1987).

b. The next 13 plants are exotic species that were discovered abroad by Irish botanists or explorers.

c. The last 19 plates are of cultivars associated with Irish nurserymen or gardeners.

The two volumes included, of course, a selection only, of plants of Irish interest and were designed to meet broad popular appeal. It would be of great benefit to Irish students and the public if Mrs. Walsh would continue to devote her talents to the production of further volumes.

CHAPTER 6

MARY DELANY

Pyracantha Coccinea

This illustration was selected for the purpose of this study because it is regarded as one of the most striking of her collages from the aspects of detail, absence of decorative embellishment and acute observations.

Description of Illustration No.12

The long woody stem of Pyracantha Coccinea is cut from fragments of brown and rust coloured paper. The base of the twig shows the lighter internal live wood with just a hint of green, surrounded by brown bark. The stem also has carefully cut thorns, all from the same dark brown paper.

The first group of five leaves are cut from four different shades of green while the veins were added in a light yellow.

The leaves are set alternatively along the stem, in groups. The first group has no flowers. The second group bears only two leaves and fifteen flowers and buds. Four of these are fully open to reveal five tiny petals. From the centre of these flowers radiate

Illustration 12 : Pyracantha Coccinea by Mary Delany

many tiny stamens, each cut either separately or in a star-like shape from one piece of yellow paper.

On the entire branch, there are approximately 154 flowers and buds. On the tip of the branch the freshest growth leaves are a light brown colour with dark brown venation.

An important aspect concerning this illustration (which indicates Mrs. Delany's botanical interest) are the berries, obviously completed at a later date, when ripe, and added to the composition.

There is a cluster of nineteen red berries with three leaves (two dark green and one light green). One dark leaf has a vein of the lighter green.

The colours of the berries vary from a dark pink, through red and to a very pale orange. One of the berries consists of just one layer of red paper but some of them have up to four layers of coloured paper, usually the bottom layer of paper being the darkest and the largest, and the rest becoming lighter and smaller. This provides a very life-like dimension to the shape of the berries and also gives the effect of the play of light on their shiny skins.

Damask Rose

This collage was chosen for the purpose of this study as it shows the variety of Mrs. Delany's botanical art, while presenting an individual stylized, nearly Rococo, view of the plant concerned.

Description of Illustration No.13

Many narrow lengths of brown and green paper are built up together to form the stem. Tiny slivers cut at right angles to the stem imitate the thorns.

As the stem progresses it divides into four separate smaller stems and at this junction, a leaf is divided into seven smaller leaflets (this leaf arrangement is called 'pinnate'). The first three pairs of leaflets are opposite each other and the last one is a terminal leaf. The leaflets with their perfectly serrated edges are mostly of a dull green colour. One leaflet is cut from a very green piece of paper. Three of these leaflets are folded over to reveal their two sides with the upper side cut from brown paper.

The venation is created with tiny lines of lighter green and yellow paper. The other leaves are also edged with this lighter tone which gives the

Illustration 13 : Damask Rose by Mary Delany

effect of sunlight catching the edges of the shiny leaves.

The portrait of the Damask Rose shows eight flowers most of which are in different stages of unfolding. The crowning glory of these is the one fully opened rose, which consists of six or seven shades of pink, from red to white. Some of them seem to be touched up with watercolours. The curved three dimensional effect looks 'almost Rococo', (Hayden, 1980). It resembles the roses Mrs. Delany made in her shellwork.

The centre or edge of the rose is a mustard yellow which seems to be slightly touched with watercolour. The many stamens are made up from tiny (1mm x 1mm and smaller) rectangular pieces of a bright yellow paper.

The other unopened buds show wonderful details in the long curved delicate sepals. There are also more immature leaves unfolding, cut from the light greeny yellow paper.

As with all Mrs. Delany's 'Paper Mosaicks', the black paper background sets off the colours to their best advantage.

KATHERINE PLUNKET

Compositae - Carduus Acaulis

This picture is selected for illustration as it contains intense movement and varied palette, filling the whole page from corner to corner.

Description of Illustration No.14

The leaf and flower shapes were first indicated in soft pencil, after which watercolour was added.

Only the upper stems and leaves are visible. The painted leaves are composed of many different shades of greens with tones and highlights of grey and yellow. The pointed tips are edged with white which add the sharp thistle-like appearance.

The sepals, although much smaller than the leaves, retain the details in shape and colour. The petals are long and narrow, graduated from the purple coloured base, through pink to the white tips. Miss Plunket used a varied palette for this illustration.

There are two flowers shown, one of which is half open and drawn from the side, and the other fully open with its green eye or centre, clearly visible. The straw-like texture of the petals is conveyed.

Illustration 14 : Carduus Acaulis by Katherine Plunket

Compositae - Hypochoerus Radicata

This illustration is indicated as it is rather exceptional in as much as a tall plant is shown by fitting two sections to the page and by demonstrating its retention of all essential details in a particularly loose watercolour.

Description of Illustration No.15

Katherine Plunket's illustration of Hypochoenis Radicata is unusual in as much as the roots as well as the leaves, stems and flowers are all indicated. Miss Plunket has handled the problem of a plant, rather too tall for the page, by continuing the stem off the top and continuing it back in at the bottom of the page, so that the whole plant was shown. This is a successful device which enables the viewer to observe the whole plant at once and as one. It is a method many other botanical illustrators use i.e., Bauer Bros., Redoute.

The roots are painted in three shades of brown. There is no evidence of a preliminary pencil drawing and none of the leaves are given definite sharp edges. It is an impressionistic view of the leaves. A varied green palette was used for this painting. The lighter tones were the first to be painted, the darker ones added on top in layers. In the venation on the

Illustration 15 : Hypochoerus Radicata by Katherine Plunket

leaves, lighter green is allowed show through the darker paint. The stems are created by many different coloured fine lines from a very light yellow/green to dark brown.

There are five flower buds, two of which are unopened. One full blooming yellow flower and a closed faded blossom. There is also an opened white seed head.

This portrait demonstrates Miss Plunket's botanical accuracy, where every part and stage of the plant's life-cycle is visible, combined with her watercolourist skills.

Droseraceae - Drosera Longifolia (Sundew)

The reason for the selection of this plant was the fineness of the drawing, while including great richness of colour.

Description of Illustration No.16

This is a small portrait measuring approximately three and a half by two and a half inches across.

The plant is viewed from eye level. Like many of Katherine Plunket's flower illustrations, the Longifolia shows the piece of the ground where the

plant is growing. Numerous leaf stems radiate from this point in the earth. The colour of the stems vary from pale green through red to brown, applied in very fine lines of paint. These vary in length from half an inch to almost two inches. The ends of the stems swell into flat spoon like shapes which curve and double over.

From these leaves radiate hundreds of red lines. Each one delicately painted with the finest brush or pen.

The flower stem also rises from the base of the plant at ground level but is taller than the leaves. The sturdy base of the stem is brown and green but these colours become gradually lighter as the stem grows. At the top, two brown buds have opened into white petalled, green eyed flowers.

The painting shows one open flower and another half open flower bud and four alternate buds at various stages of maturity.

This is an exceptionally detailed painting and there is evidence that fine pencil guidelines were first drawn to indicate the general direction of the stems and leaves. Watercolours were added to form definite shapes and the finishing touches seem to have been added with a fine pen.

Illustration 16 : Drosera Longifolia, 'Sundew', by Katherine Plunket

Paeoniceae Paeonia ('Anne Rosse')

This illustration was chosen as it is one of the most finely detailed and coloured paintings in the Florilegium.

Description of Illustration No.17

> *The deciduous leaves are trifoliate and the leaflets are segmented further.... each leaf, including the petiole may be as much as 50cm long and about 40cm across....The flowers are 8cm to 12cm in diameter composed of about ten petals which are bright yellow with red streaks on the outer surface and red marginal markings* (Irish Florilegium, 1983).

The edges of the petals are finely edged with red, which bleed in toward the eye of the flowers in minute capillaries. The delicate red edge gives a three-dimensional feel to the flowers.

The three flowers show different stages of unfolding from a flower bud, to a faded bloom, the main focal point being the brightest open flower, with its bright red stamens.

Illustration 17 : Paeonia, 'Anne Rosse', by Wendy Walsh

The only sections shown are the seedpods of the plant, one of which is the split seedpod, with its smooth black seed inside. It is so detailed as to show the white fleecey lining of the pod.

The stem of the plant is a cool fresh green in contrast with the bright flowers. The Peaonia only has foliage on new wood and this is illustrated by indicating a part of last year's growth, brown and woody.

Amaryllidaceae Galanthus 'Straffan' and 'Hill Poe' (Snowdrops)

This illustration was selected as a fine example of Mrs. Walsh's work as a strictly botanical artist.

Description of Illustration No.18

Mrs. Walsh's illustrations of the Galanthus show her as a strict botanical artist.

As well as roots, bulbs, leaves and flowers, there are sections of the various parts of the flower included on the same page.

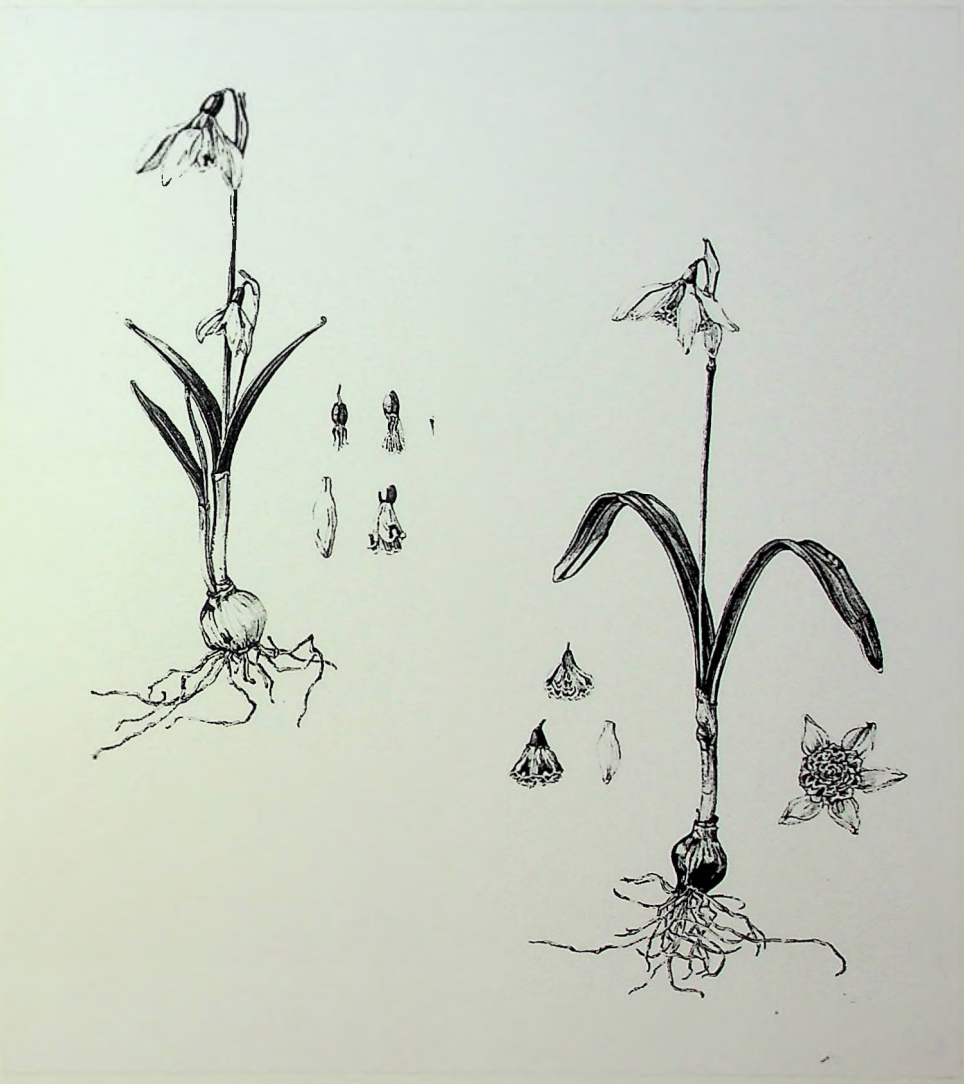

Illustration 18 : Galanthus 'Straffan', Snowdrop by Wendy Walsh

She has overcome the problem of painting white flowers on a white background by slightly outlining the edges of the petals and shading them in tones of greys. The stems and leaves are of a realistic silver green. The parallel venation is clearly visible.

Again the bulb is white and as well as having a slight outline, it has touches of brown. The detail continues right down to the yellowish red anthers, each of which measures only 3mm by 1mm.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The initial plan for this study was to select three botanical artists, each to represent one of the last three centuries and it was by chance that they turned out to be three ladies with Irish connections. They were chosen after close examination of their work and after comparing them with other artists of their time.

To contrast the artists concerned, it was felt that the art of each of the three women was distinctive - Mrs. Delany's work being collages, the Plunket's resembling a personal floral record and Mrs. Walsh's being, of course, beautiful and strictly botanical records.

The precision and accuracy of the work of Mrs. Delany and the Misses Plunket was all the more remarkable as, in their day, drawing and watercolour painting was often regarded as merely a polite accomplishment for well-bred ladies of a family. This may also be said of the artistry of Mrs. Walsh who, of course went on to develop what might be called a professional competency in her botanical illustration.

As regards originality, it seems likely that Mrs. Delany was probably influenced in her botanical collages by the seventeenth/eighteenth century work of

the French technique of 'Decoupage' (involved cutting our paper shapes for decorating objects) and Chinese and Japanese lacquered work.

Nevertheless, it is clear that Mrs. Delany must be credited with the invention of a remarkable medium of collage for flower reproduction. However, although these were well made and most colourful, with reasonable botanical accuracy, they could not be said to have advanced the art of botanical illustration, as they could not be reproduced for general distribution until recently with the aid of modern techniques, to botanists and other interested people (as were the works of Ehret, Weiditz etc.). Generally, she refrained from showing, 'the warts and all' aspects of plants, which limited botanical interest.

Mrs. Delany's selection of plants for illustration appears to have been governed by the visual attractiveness of individual plants and flowers which she came across in England as well as contributions received from well known botanical gardens and others. It did not aim towards a comprehensive catalogue of flora. In her originality, however, she must be considered a milestone in the field of botanical illustrations.

Apart from naming the plants Mrs. Delany did not appear to have any specific botanical objective in regard to classifying or indexing her collection.

No information has yet come to light regarding the Plunket ladies' art or botanical education but it is recorded that there were family connections with John Foster MP, a leading member of the Dublin Society and well known for his horticultural interests. Like Mrs. Delany, drawing and painting was no doubt included in their schooling.

Included in the Plunket Volume are all wild plants which they collected and painted on location during travels in Ireland, England, Switzerland, Germany, France, Italy, Scotland and Spain. Many of Mrs. Delany's Plants were foreign also, but were collected by others.

The Plunkets' book was neither indexed nor categorised but the genera and species were indicated within each plant family. Despite lacking some features, the drawings were mainly botanically accurate. While not strictly an Irish Flora, the collection is of considerable Irish botanical value. A commentator has remarked (M. Scannell) that the paintings were 'striking and the species readily recognisable'.

Unfortunately the Plunket Volume of paintings has never been published but it must be considered a significant strand in the development of Irish Botanical art. It is still standard reference for students at the National Botanical Gardens.

The Plunket collection contains a large number of Irish plants. It might also be described as a European Flora and is divided into family, genus and species. In this respect it comes considerably closer than Mrs. Delany to being a comprehensive botanical record.

Fortunately for Ireland, Katherine Plunket was conscious of her Irish origins in leaving the botanical work to an Irish institution.

From a well off English milling family, Mrs. Walsh's schooling was provided by a governess and her artistic skills appear to have been self acquired; she remembers that she drew and painted flowers and animals from her very early years.

She felt that Chinese and Japanese watercolours and residence in the Far East were important influences on the development of her work. Rather surprisingly she did not begin to paint 'full-time' until her family was grown up.

Without in any way reflecting critically on the botanical accuracy of Mrs. Delany or the Misses Plunket, a feature of Mrs. Walsh's work is her strict adherence to absolute accuracy in her paintings, with the addition of anatomical sections. In fact each painting may take up to two weeks to complete.

In contrast to the experience of Mrs. Delany and the Plunkets, Mrs. Walsh's work is specifically designed to achieve maximum benefit from the advances in modern colour printing and is usually produced for publication.

While she has a considerable botanical knowledge of her own, she produces the Florilegiums in association with Dr. Charles Nelson, of the National Botanical Gardens. She is a professional botanical artist.

COMMENTS

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries amateur artists were influenced by the cultured environment and in the future this situation will no doubt continue when people wish to draw and paint for their own amusement with or without the guidance of the many modern educational aids. However, it appears that we have reached the end of an era in the botanical illustration and public expectations will

require complete accuracy in line with continuing scientific discovery.

In future the high standards of modern reproduction of botanical paintings make them difficult to greatly improve. Advances will probably lie in increasingly comprehensive botanical works.

It seems unlikely that the excellence of modern photography will abolish the need for first class botanical illustrators and botanists, as photographic reproduction provides only an impression of plants which may not show adequately all the anatomical features. Furthermore, photographs are subject to colour variations and their permanence is sometimes suspect. Botanical illustration shows more due to the impeccably observant artist's eye, collecting every detail and noting them all one by one, all in full focus. Some plant parts will remain at a further point from the camera than others and so all may not be in full focus.

Finally, the botanical works of Mrs. Delany and the Misses Plunket must be regarded as remarkable productions in the environment of their respective times and are of considerable value to posterity. In 1980, some of Mrs. Delany's highly inventive collage work was illustrated in a published book (Mrs. Delany, Her Life and Her Flowers, Ruth Hayden). It appears

desirable that efforts should be made to have 'The Plunket Volume ' published also, perhaps by arranging suitable sponsorship.

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