

Shearing Magnolia

There's a garden next door
where a gardener works-
the Land,
cutting and pruning
loving and cherishing
Her-
Crockern
(the land lived, worked and died upon).

He has petal eyes
the colour of his favourite magnolia tree's inner flower-
green veined with crimson
moving to a milk skin as sung of in a 1001 nights.

He is in love with his magnolia tree, calls her Chameleon
as he stands there-
in clothes colour-coordinated to his eyes, and the garden
he takes care of.
Even his voice is
soft with green.

|||||
The next day,
when I meet an oak wood
called Wistman, famous in biodiversity circles, for its unique location
-on top of the moors-
I am shown lichen. I touch it and it is as
gentle as the gardener
and similar in hue-
Crockern? Crockern? Crockern?
Are you there?
I'm sure She speaks to him
through the leaves of trees and the compost in the soil.

The wind carries stories
and pushes me forward

|||||
wet sylvan remembrance
moist with recalled
idylls.
'rustic' ? 'pastoral' ?

Theocritus, Virgil,
Petrarch, Mantuan,
Sannazaro, Tasso and
Guarini.
Spenser, Pope and Ambrose Philips.
John Fletcher and Ben Johnson,
Christopher Marlowe, Walter Raleigh, Mary Herbert and
John Milton-

What *would* you
write about this?
Is this Arcadia?
The land of satyrs,
nymphs, dryads, fauns

and shepherds
who-
-when not seducing one another-
can eulogize
on love, poesy, death-
can satirize
politics, society- critique corruption-
I suppose its 'As I Like it' really –
I could read a million and more
myths, legends, stories,
fables out of this land-
There is no escape from
Crockern's call
as I tread past trees
so green,
you must be able to suck the sap and never wake up from a tale never told.

|||||
the flowers, they're pregnant with poems
teasing me into pastures of purple prose. Tantalized,
I walk on
and feel like Alice wandering-wondering
about
a land cultivated 'in beauty' . Or is it 'for beauty' ?
will 'Beauty Save the World'
as Doestoyovsky once proclaimed?
Famously? Notoriously?
Naïve? Prophetic?

|||||

Crockern is a crucible
and the dew that drops at night from the wings of moths- chrysalis
dreams forming in the drool of a sleepy open mouth is actually
the spit of the pot,
bubbling forth its clear bouillon from deep
inside
out
onto the grass-
that looks so moist
and warm, ready to wrap you in a fur of tropical air- but feels cold
with the frost of anger biting toes
hungry for more soup. Crockern pours
Herself from winter into summer, washing us with colours,
so many hues of green, white, orange, pink and
so on and so much and so much, on and on-
pissing fecundity into our mouths and eyes, ears and
noses until all
orifices are full. And yet the hole remains
wounded and open- spilling a pupae's blood onto the ground.
The search for sustenance continues
boring into the crust of Her body, spirals
through the dark crumbles of earth-
(that we want to package and genetically modify into
little pots
so we can grow small herbs and plants, control the
seeds of Her existence. And we will never more
be at the mercy

of Her breast crying for more and more and more)

And still Her hand
turns the pot's
spoon silver and gentle
alchemical crepuscule melted and waiting –

|||||
Sssht! Its so quiet here!

I can hear so many things.

Can you?

Can you hear Her?

Crockern?

“If you scratch my back,
I'll break yours!”

“Eat Me! Eat Me!”
I think She says-

“Partake of my body
and you will know ever- ”

No! No. It's the grockel of sheep
Ewes, Rams and Wether,
Lambs
Hoggety
2 tooth 4 tooth
6 tooth 8 tooth
Broken Mouths –
being sheared.

|||||

Are the shuffling sheep
'ecloguing'
amongst themselves about the good old 'dog and stick' days
like two shepherds in a pastoral play discussing
today's contentious issues?

|||||

Decoupling?

Ponies and Passports?

The high brown fritillary artillery?
-of violets, bracken, little grass and more heat,
just enough (not too much) nectaring bramble
and thistle-
discussed and tended and created
by Nature, farmers and ecologists on
Common Ground.

And as Vladimir Nobakov once noted: “It is astounding

how little the ordinary person notices about butterflies” .

If not the fate of pupate,
then what of subsidies and ecological schemes?

hay meadows, bluebells, cows and deer woodland
all spread out before us to walk through
with our dogs and picnics and city slicker golden age
dreams-

-COUNTRY LIFE-

a commodity
cultivated by
a subsidized cattle and sheep hill top farmer turned landscape preserver.

sylvan heaven
breeding
religious fervour- at the end of an era.
Humans and Nature
Living together in romantic harmony?

-Archaic Arcadia-

the moor looms over head
rough and ready for everything – the farmers slowly move
away to a more easily cultured and cultivated land where
the elements do not stunt oak trees, central heating is only
a field away, and ancient knowledge is lost-

OR HOW ABOUT THE REPURCUSSIONS OF FOOT AND MOUTH?

Yeah. “Lets talk about Responsibility.”

And-
why do they call the person who does all
the books, sorts out the accounts, runs the house, rears the children, plucks turkey feathers, walks the
dogs, counts the sheep, studies a degree in agriculture, cooks the meals, tends wounds, works as a
professional adviser to other farm families, apprentices as a milker on a dairy farm...

The Farmer's Wife?
why not call her
The Farmer?

And with this new legislation-
where are all the dead lambs supposed to go?

|||||

The farmer flung the lamb
-dead
into the woodland below us. It looked plastic
in its rigid state, like those farmhouse
toys I played with as a child, like
the tractor and bright red ear muffles driven and worn in a
countryside barn,
like a very noisy quad bike

zooming across fields of idyll pastoral stuff-
unreal?

The magazines I read
never show machines
intercepting where humankind communes with Nature
-unless it a sexy '70s car with a tiger on the bonnet and a babe at the wheel-

Funny, how its softness
inside continued-
warm wet and red
even when-
outside
The lamb was stuck- in an eternal position-
glued by death like a non-flying non-aerodynamic model plane.

The fox had incised a
hole into the lamb's side, accessed an organ-ic(?) feast.
There was no torn flesh,
nor shards of meat- as expected from a late teenage propensity to watching midnight werewolf
movies- only a mortician's
peep hole
into the original cause of death-
pink lungs spotted black-

"Pneumonia"
said The farmer as he
held his dead livelihood in his hands.
|||||

these grim reaper hands
are the same
gynecological hands
that helped give birth to the sheep, now being shorn by
the same hands
that will drive to the slaughter house
hands-
in sickness and in health
that protect- from blowfly, bramble and barbed wire
hard hands
worked soft by the fleece's grease
to have and to hold
these hands
are leared to the land
to honour and to obey
hefted to Crockern
(She's here)
to love and to cherish
'til death do us part.

Tania van Schalkwyk
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Crockern: is the tough spirit of Dartmoor land, often referred to in masculine terms. Here, Crockern takes on a female persona.
Grockel: Devon term for crowds of tourist traffic