

Charlotte Fairbairn

God Breathes His Dreams Through Nathaniel Cadwallader

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Never underestimate the comfort of cities; the countryside is far more unsettling, as Charlotte Fairbairn's new novel testifies. The throb of unease and disquiet flows through a village, curdling milk, destroying crops and creating harsh, bitter lives. The rape of a young girl and the suspicious death of the local pastor cement the cruelty that characterises the spirit of the village – until a stranger comes to them, offering salvation.

Nathaniel Cadwallader, carpenter and supposed sage, is no ordinary mortal, or so the villagers believe. When he arrives in the remote valley, an unnamed, isolated place, and takes up residence among the despondent villagers, they believe he is the essence of some benign goodness. The unreal quality of both the landscape and the characters moves the reader to question constantly the real reason for Nathaniel's arrival. He appears to see and understand everything, but for what purpose?

Each person from the village receives a talisman that Nathaniel has made for them, an intricately carved symbol that speaks only to them, curing them of the spiritual disease that

afflicts them. These miraculous gifts go unacknowledged by the villagers, with no evident gratitude or recognition for this man who has chosen to come among them. For the reader there is no peaceful hiatus as the book is so tightly wound

one can only wait for the backlash that surely awaits. The village becomes suspicious, fearful again, and when another death occurs the villagers turn against Nathaniel.

The novel reads as a rather terrifying parable of good and evil, of fear and guilt, as the characters roam unfettered through their own micro-cosmic landscape. Mythical and supernatural elements are blended with a sense of foreboding that remains unresolved and is far more disturbing than the events that unfold in the novel.

Karen McTigue, Waterstone's Covent Garden

