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Review: *Nature Cure: A Story of Depression and Healing*

By Richard Mabey

Reviewed by Matthew Aaron Tennant
Oxford, UK

Mabey, Richard. *Nature Cure: A Story of Depression and Healing*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2005. 242 pp. US \$27.95. cloth. ISBN 978-0-8139-2621-6. Alkaline paper.

Nature Cure is a poignant memoir of Richard Mabey's journey from depression to healing in England's East Anglia region. The book begins with Mabey, who is in his fifties, being forced to move from the home he has inhabited his entire life. After hearing about and accepting a few vacant rooms in a friend's farmhouse, he moves to his new lair. The book covers a period of about one year, and during the course of this year, the reader follows Mabey as he closely observes the world around him. It is these observations that color the text and bring the reader into close contact with the natural world of East Anglia. Mabey transitions fluidly to relevant flashbacks that help the reader understand some present day aspect of his situation. He also writes about his relationship with Poppy, another plant lover and the woman who helps him in his transition to mental health.

Throughout most of the book, Mabey tells of his experiences and observations, but he occasionally writes more philosophically. For instance, in his description of "sympathetic magic," he writes, "It's a different way of understanding and, its followers hope, influencing the world. It begins with observations and experiences, but then, instead of attempting to explain these by reducing them to ever smaller and more discreet parts or 'atoms', looks at them more broadly until they seem to fit into the weave of the world" (176). Mabey takes a holistic approach to observing the world, and he appreciates the great natural variety found in his surroundings. Readers might find that Mabey challenges them to think about the world in a different way, and his observations of nature could inspire readers to notice greater natural detail in their current surroundings. Mabey's eloquent style draws attention to the beauty of nature that is present, even in mundane things.

Toward the end of the book, Mabey recounts his first trip to the United States. He writes, "I'd always dreamed of going to America since I was a teenager...A bit of me had always wanted to sit in a diner, and ride in a yellow cab, as if they were moments from a favorite fairy-story" (207). It may seem strange for someone to have "always dreamed of going to America" in this era of international disdain for American foreign policy, but Mabey helps illustrate the vast, rugged beauty that can be appreciated in the United States. Reading an Englishman's observations of the landscape from New York to the Chesapeake Bay is fresh, and Mabey directs the reader to appreciate nature in whatever form it is observable.

Mabey's has a unique, easy and accessible writing style. General interest readers can enjoy this book, even if they do not recognize every species of flora and fauna about which he

writes. Readers who are more specialized naturalists can take pleasure in Mabey's close contact and unobtrusive interaction with the natural world.

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