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Seed to Dust: Life, Nature, and a Country Garden

Marc Hamer
Greystone Books (May 4, 2021)
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Marc Hamer's *Seed to Dust* is a meditative account of a year in the twelve-acre British garden he tended for decades. The seasons turn with comforting regularity, assuaging the ache of aging and bad memories.

Hamer's account of his final year as a gardener is loving. When he started, the site was a London family's weekend, countryside retreat. Rumor had it that his employer, the septuagenarian Miss Cashmere, had been a spy during the Cold War. Hamer, in his sixties and slowing down due to heart problems and stiff joints, chronicles the garden's progress and recalls a period of vagrancy after he left school at fifteen.

Hamer begins with winter dreaming and preparation, but the book is soon overtaken by the hard labor of planting, mowing, pruning, scything, and deadheading. The writing is infused with a deep knowledge of nature's rhythms, including the flowers blooming, and birds and insects flying, in a given month. Hamer marks the solstice and writes of life cycles and the legends associated with plants.

This is creative nonfiction, as the prologue acknowledges: "in essence what is here is truth, although in fact it is often not." The prose is adorned with lovely metaphors: "I kneel, a gardener priest tending to my flock of dahlias" and "my jug of a head is empty and light to carry." Black-and-white woodcut-style illustrations by Jonathan Ashworth are a gorgeous addition. In places, though, the content becomes repetitive—a danger of the diary format. However, the book's focus on emotions and self-perception is refreshing.

As it wanes, this quiet but exuberant book develops a melancholy afterglow: a way of life is ending, yet the uxorious Hamer is content with his home life. *Seed to Dust* posits nature and love as consolations for life's sadness.

REBECCA FOSTER (May / June 2021)

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