

# book review by john varney

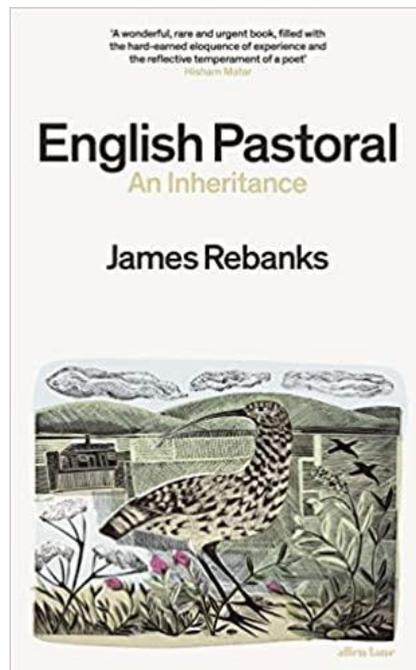
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## English Pastoral

- An inheritance

by James Rebanks

Published by Allen Lane – Penguin Books 2020



This enjoyable, warm-hearted story is a wake-up call to all who love nature. A personal history of a farming family's response to change, it provides a colourful introduction to ideas around regenerative agriculture. Three generations of shifting practices lead to a loss of and, later a return to, a fulsome relationship with nature. In a short time, after the war, traditional farming practices, evolved over millennia, were abandoned. As supermarkets pushed down prices, the quest for ever greater yields drove intensification and a chemical fuelled fight with nature. This has been damaging to the soil itself and everything it sustains. Our author's personal doubts and values bring him to a new understanding and a changed way to be a farmer.

In Act one, the author recalls his childhood in the company of his grandfather, a man determined to uphold his deeply felt values and sustain a traditional way of life, when all around were adopting new modern ways.

Act two is characterised by his father, reluctantly adopting modern ways, in spite of smallness of scale, in search of a better, less exhausting life. Intimate anecdotes convey the farmer's inner conflict and the pressure to compromise values in the quest for economic viability, caught in a system that lauds industrialisation and ignores the balance of nature. The system has triumphed and food prices have tumbled, but at huge cost to the land and those who work it. All this is summed up in the statement, "Our power to beat up Mother Nature has grown exponentially in my lifetime, wearing the mask of progress".

Act three brings hope, in the shape of the English Pastoral of the title – the re-discovery and re-establishment of a relationship with the land and with nature, on the part of farmers and countryfolk. Having shared with us his story of life on the land, in a marvellous admission of human limitations, the author makes a plea for a closer relationship between us and the sources of our food. "All of us together can transform our landscapes one little act at a time".

**Read this and be inspired!**