

Cretan Post-Pastoral

Terry Gifford¹

Each day's end the mountain closes the sun -
watch it go until that glow remaining shows
the solitary tree that before you could not see.

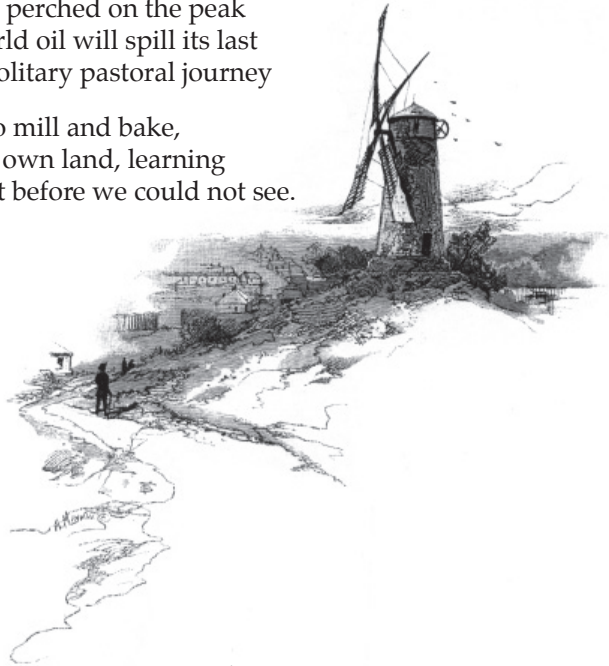
In the hills where they harvest honey
a huge mirror is being built in a bowl to throw away
the sun at 800 degrees towards a solitary turbine.

In a hollow in the barren hills windmills
water fields of green. Below, watermills,
in spring, made flour for solitary ovens.

This is an island without trains
to which we come by planes and rent
a car for the pull up a solitary mountain

Where there's a church perched on the peak
against all ills. But world oil will spill its last
drop and stop even a solitary pastoral journey

and we'll learn again to mill and bake,
hunkered down in our own land, learning
from a solitary tree that before we could not see.



¹ Terry Gifford is Reader in Literature and Environment at the University of Leeds and Director of the annual International Festival of Mountaineering Literature. He lives in urban Sheffield and climbs in the Peak District in the evenings. His origins are in Cambridge - flat, rich land and flat big skies where water is ever present. His ancestors and family elders skated on the Fens from Ely to Cambridge, but he escaped to mountains and rock-climbing, never having moved from his student town in the moorland north in 35 years of teaching. But he also loves the landscape and culture of Crete and the mountain village in Spain which he shares with friends, learning from a village culture about a terrain of almond and olive terraces that is intimately known in its seasons.