

DOLLED UP

Not many of we valley people, wrapped up as we are in the humdrum tasks and everyday doings so typical of the lowlands, are or were familiar with this side of his nature, but if you wandered in that region (a higher region, it has to be said, that is rarely, if ever, visited by the vast majority of my lowland cohabitants) of the hill country often enough, chances are that you would bump into him, or at least spot him from a distance as he trod his own path between the craggy and occasionally mossy outcrops. Of course you would have had to have known him before-hand, or at least be familiar with high quality detailed portrait studies, to recognise him straight away, for he always took great pains with his appearance on these mountain jaunts, such pains being dedicated to producing often quite startling changes of surface texture and hue. It was as if this was the place and the height (just above the tree line, a place of openness, exposure, and fine air) where he felt he could and should best flower, where he could come into the difference of his own-most, as it were, and express, however, fleetingly, across his entire surface the, for the most part buried, truth of his own natural being (a being which he clearly felt had, from the very beginning, been rooted in and hence was entirely indebted to, that strange union of the earthly and the unearthly, the stickily massily solid and the vaporously other, which we, we lowlanders that is, typically gloss as life with a lower-case 'l').

Not that he was hifalutin about any of this when out on one of his mountain rambles. Far from it! No, he was in fact very much down to earth and precisely concrete in his preparations and the selection and styling of his rig, although the latter may, at first sight, have appeared to strangers to have been severely impractical and out of joint with the apparent demands of the surrounding terrain, a region of stony and often steep paths, miry leas, slippery scree-slopes and precipitously overhanging rocks. Hiking boots, for example, were, for him, definitely not *de rigueur* on such occasions. Abrasions to calf and shin were all part of the risk, the delight of the challenge.

Nor was the weather a major disincentive! For I have seen him, even on days when most sensible people would have stayed indoors dozing in front of a roaring fire with a good book on their laps, braving the lashings of wind and rain as if oblivious to everything but the trappings of his key project of self-unconcealment, if I can so call it, a self-disclosure dependent upon a most direct relation with the things of this world, nature's very stuffs. And equally so on the fine clear days of high summer. For him the occasion's moment, in and as its instant passing away, was, it seems, all. Indeed the last time I saw him up there was no exception, for it was a day of squally breezes and sharp showers interspersed with the inevitable sunny intervals, just the kind of day to test the mettle of the committed hill walker.

Naturally, I was out on one of my many wort searches and, at the time, scrabbling about on my hands and knees in the gravel behind a sheltering boulder, where I was sifting through the loose aggregate of feldspars in the hope of finding a rare wort specimen, when I heard a faint jingling from the path beyond the boulder. Peering out from my partially hidden and lowly work-station I could see his spry figure skipping capriciously along the track towards me. Although we were effectively above the sheep (even perhaps the goat) line at this height, he nevertheless had the usual group of assorted prancing young (I could tell this from the length of their horns) rams in attendance, sometimes weaving ahead of him, sometimes behind, and occasionally trying to nuzzle his hands. They showed no fear.

Not, apparently, ideally suited to such a forbidding terrain, his high-stiletto-heeled shoes, complete with shark-skin uppers and hand-stitched welts, were actually worn and managed with delicate aplomb as he picked his way confidently (some might have said brazenly) among the stone fragments and cock-sure adolescent rams – stumbling was a rarity. Occasionally there would be what seemed like minor confrontations (although the bumpings seemed to border on something less than mere chance assignations) with one or more of the rams as they moved in close and nudged his thigh, attracted perhaps by the astringency of his perfume and the somewhat garish blusher on his already rubicund cheeks. They gave little snorts of what I took to be delighted erotic anticipation and, in response, he would allow, now and then, one of them to nibble the finely-wrought Nottingham lace hem of his knee-length taffeta skirt (dirndl it wasn't!). Then, shoo! he would say (in a not-overly-convincing

tone) if a ram's snout, showing inclinations of taking things further, sought to wander from hem to thigh. Even at this height, apparently so far removed from the dulled gawp of our lowland crowds, it seemed that proprieties had to be seen to be observed.

Not yet certain whether he would recognise me from our previous happenstance meetings, I stepped out from behind my sheltering boulder and waved somewhat shyly. But, as ever, he reciprocated immediately with a friendly but flamboyant flap of his be-gloved (elbow-length, mustard-velvet, sequin-studded) hand, the tiny silver bells on the end of the gloves' fingers tinkling gently in time to the movement. He gave me a convivial but almost imperceptibly sly wink as we passed. Just as I had done on the previous occasions, I stood for a few seconds, in the grip of a certain fascinated awe, watching him totter gamely and, I have to admit, with some bravura style, off and away across the largely barren karst, while the rams frolicked playfully around and about his elegant black fishnet-tighted legs. In those distant days, when the rambling (and, indeed, some of the living too) was relatively carefree and seemingly easefully straightforward, I am sure that nobody (and especially not our died-in-the-wool lowlanders) down in the valley, where he enjoyed an enviable reputation for very different things (a certain elusively dignified reserve and a mind apparently completely absorbed by and dedicated to so-called higher things), knew of his double, or possibly multiple, life. Were I to mention it to one or two people, almost anyone down there in fact, I feel sure that they would say with absolute conviction and mounting indignation something like, well that's certainly not the Mr. Heidegger we know and love.