

# ***The Girl Green as Elderflower***

First published by Secker & Warburg, 1980

*He thought of his dream, of how he had looked up out of his hole, his pit, his wolf-pit, and seen the foreign leaves, which had formed themselves into a face ...*

Laid low by a tropical disease and an accompanying malaise, Crispin Clare returns to his ancestral home in East Anglia. Local folklore seeps into his fever dreams and into his writing, and the lines between reality and myth soon start to blur. In this finely woven tale of illness and recovery, family and fable, Randolph Stow creates a unique imaginative landscape, populated by figures from old English myths and legends and from Clare's present.

(Introduction by Kerry Goldsworthy)



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Crispin Clare, an anthropologist who seems to have had nervous-breakdownish sorts of problems abroad, returns to Suffolk to live in a small cottage near his sister and her children. Then, while Clare is playing the Ouija board one night, a sprite named Malkin appears – and in short order Clare is host to various manifestations, along with tales of other centuries-old apparitions and legends. The most charming of these: the story of a merman who is caught in a fisherman's net and put under military guard, where he becomes deeply fond of his jailer. Also rather diverting: the tale of the au-pair girl who turns out actually to be one of the storied and libidinous “green children” spoken of by William of Newburgh in the twelfth-century *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*. Stow, at first with too preciously a literary style, has some fun flashing these paranormal/mythic shards up into the contemporary light; yet his little book, less a story than a wee collection, seems to have a heart of eccentric research...

Source: <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/andrew-stow/the-girl-green-as-elderflower/>



## Abridge Review by Tony Hassall

The novelist Crispin Clare, recovers from the illness he contracted as a colonial anthropologist. This is the first book Stow wrote in East Anglia, where he had lived for more than a decade, and it is in that softer landscape, and with the pattern of its seasons, that Clare is brought back to life by his newly rediscovered family and by old and new friends. Stow works all of these people into his adaptations of three twelfth-century Suffolk legends originally recorded by Ralph of Coggershall and William of Newburgh. In their different ways, these legends all address the isolation and alienation that are part of Clare's illness, and in revisiting them he is repossessing the house of his spirit – which has, in the imagery of *Visitants* been invaded by an alien – as well as discovering the country of his ancestors that is, in an atavistic sense, already his own. A gentler and more hopeful alternative to the bleak intensity of *Visitants*, *Girl Green* fictionalizes a vital stage in its author's spiritual autobiography and is understandably a favorite of his.

Source: *Vanishing Wunderking: The great oeuvre of the enigmatic Stow* by Tony Hassall.

