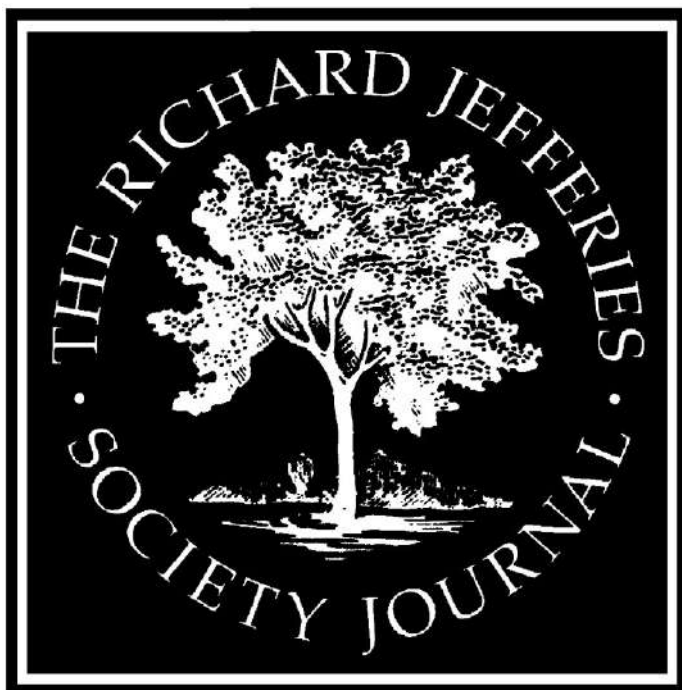




NUMBER 24

Winter 2012

The RICHARD JEFFERIES SOCIETY (Registered Charity No. 1042838) was founded in 1950 to promote appreciation and study of the writings of Richard Jefferies (1848-1887). Its activities include the Annual General Meeting and Birthday Lecture, winter meetings, summer outings, special events, and the publication of two *Journals*, spring and autumn Newsletters and an Annual Report. Membership is open to all on payment of the current annual subscription: £12.00 – individual; £14.00 – couple (UK rate).

President	<i>Andrew Rossabi</i>
Hon. Secretary	<i>Jean Saunders (Tel: 01793 783040)</i> <i>Pear Tree Cottage</i> <i>Longcot, Faringdon</i> <i>Oxon SN7 7SS</i>
Website	http://richardjefferiessociety.co.uk
Email	info@richardjefferiessociety.co.uk

The *Journal* is the official organ of the Society. Copies are available for £2.00 (postage extra), along with other Society publications, from the Hon. Secretary. Free electronic downloads can be obtained from the Society's website.

The principal aim of *The Richard Jefferies Society Journal* is to present material by Jefferies that has not been published or reprinted, or that is difficult to obtain, together with articles about Jefferies (commissioned or submitted), items of research and discovery, synopses of talks and lectures, book reviews, Wiltshire material relating to Jefferies, and correspondence.

Submissions, preferably in electronic format, should be sent to the Editor at the following address: RJSjournal@richardjefferiescreativity.co.uk or by post to the Hon. Secretary. MSS and correspondence for publication will be acknowledged but cannot be returned unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

The Editorial team comprises: Rebecca Welshman and Simon Coleman; proof-reading by Peter Robins; type-setting by Jean Saunders.

© Copyright in previously unpublished material is retained by the author, and in other material, except where otherwise stated, by the Editors. The views of contributors are their own, and do not necessarily represent those of the Editors or the Society. The Editors' decision about content is final.

RICHARD JEFFERIES' BIRTHPLACE at Coate is a museum. It is open on Sundays from 2-5pm in the summer, on the second Wednesday of the month from 10am-4pm throughout the year and otherwise by arrangement. For details about the Museum please apply to the Secretary.



Journal No. 24, 2012

CONTENTS

Idea for a New Magazine — <i>Richard Jefferies</i>	3
Phase Shifting — <i>Amal El-Mohtar</i>	7
Curator of Ammonites — <i>Jill Sharp</i>	8
Stugged — <i>Jos Smith</i>	9
Women in the Field — <i>Professor Roger Ebbatson</i>	11
Richard Jefferies: The Nature Writer as Innocent Adam — <i>Professor Norman Chaney</i>	21
Imagining Archaeology: Nature and Landscape in the Work of Richard Jefferies (Part One) — <i>Rebecca Welshman</i>	28

Idea for a New Magazine

Conspectus of Novelty in Magazines

Richard Jefferies

This conspectus is undated, unsigned and in Richard Jefferies' handwriting. In a letter to R. Bentley, dated 18 July 1874, when Richard was living at Coate, he mentions his idea for a new magazine. The following conspectus has been worked up into a more concrete proposal, presumably not long after the letter was sent. The manuscript is held at the Richard Jefferies Museum and is part of the Samuel Looker Collection purchased by the Richard Jefferies Society in 2011.

It has often occurred to me that the great failing in all magazines published at the present time is the almost total lack of present interest. Look down the monthly advertisement list of content of half a dozen crack 2/s— magazines – and excepting an occasional political article in Blackwood – there is hardly an article upon a topic really before the public. For instance the Suez canal purchase took place at least three months before any of the magazines had an article upon it. When the articles did come they were merely arguments; now the public do not want arguments – they can see them in the dailies, they want information – get a good graphic picture. Then the Herzegovina – a good article upon the war there has yet to be written, the ignorance about the country was notorious for months. Still later the Tith [?] of Empress waited months till the Academy & Athenaeum took it up & even then they did it in a style not likely to be read by the public. Erudition is very well, but erudition must be explained, or to the mass of readers it carries no meaning. I contend that the famous maxim of the New York newspaper editor should be applied to a magazine – Let every line be readable by everybody no dull dissertations, or long leaders.

1st. then in the New magazine there should be articles written upon Present Topics – matters upon which the public mind is visibly exercised; & these articles should be not argumentation, but explanatory, throwing light upon the question as a whole, its history, bearings, & so that any one who reads should get a clear idea of what is in agitation.

When a question on a subject continues before the public for some time, then let each number of the Mag. bring the facts up to date – the position of the case. In great lawsuits as the Tichborne case, the Mistletoe & Albert, the City fraudulent companies & loans, the majority of readers have neither time nor inclination to read the dailies seriatim, they would be glad to have it all presented in a compact

shape & in sequence – in these cases it really requires some times no little power of analysis to get at the proper order of events. Even regular newspaper readers would be glad of a monthly statement to refresh these memories, & chase away the obscurity which ensues from the fearful verbiage of dailies.

At the present moment one half or section of the public is led by a liberal or radical paper, & the other half by a conservative - & both sections get a distorted view. It would be a service to the cause of truth to present a fair statement of the position pro. & con. And I am certain that the public speedily warm to appropriate honesty.

Finally there is a large class of country readers who do not take an interest in daily papers, who want the questions of the day put before them in a concrete manner, so that they can see all at once. To my personal knowledge in the country readers peruse the summaries in the Graphic, Illustrated News, etc. meagre as they are with interest. I have known many take the papers published for India & the colonies as the Home News, because they could get a better idea of what was going on from them.

2nd. There is an opening for better, fuller, & more reliable foreign correspondence. Suppose a march on Comassie [Ed. now known as Kumasi] proceeding – each mail brings in long letters from specials, & precious stuff it is, the most trivial matters, & any-one who reads it quickly loses the sequence of events, the thread of the proceedings. It is not the fault of the special, because he is compelled to write at telegraph speed, he has no time to arrange his information, & to fill up space he takes the first thing his eyes light on. Now imagine a special writing for a monthly magazine which does not press him too much for time: He could arrange his information – select good matter, describe battles fully & intelligently & write English. Such accounts would soon come to be looked for eagerly. They would be a feature in journalism.

3rd. If the magazine were illustrated a splendid opportunity could be given to special artists as to special correspondents. We might actually see sketches which really represented what they professed to: we might see engravings which could be treasured by thousands, & could track contemporaneous history. I would not reject photographs – but let them be labelled photographs, & not published as sketches. In the midst of all the hurry & eagerness to catch the sale of the minute, editors forget that of later years there has arisen among the public an increasing suspicion & distrust of publications, & an ever-growing desire for something genuine.

4th. A new phase of Literary, or Art Criticism. Everybody now knows that criticism of books & often of pictures is a fearful & wonderful

humbug. Especially do the dailies & the weekly sections mislead as any one may do who will take the trouble, finish & cut out a section of a book from one liberal (politics) review weekly, & another from a periodical in the hands of another clique. Paste them side by side on a sheet of paper & compare – then read the book yourself. The jaunty touch & go style of some reviews is a misery to read. Now it is certain that there are an immense number of people who are really anxious to know what a new book contains – the novel reader wishes to know if the new tale is suited to his particular palate – the student if any new light will be thrown upon the subject of his search. Neither can one say whether the author is a Tory or a Radical, whether he belongs to one clique or another. I should like very much to know where at the present moment they are to go for simple plain information about books. Literally nowhere. Why the opening has not been seized by some form I cannot concur. Let there be an article upon Literature giving an outline of all principal books with praising or blaming except in case of sins against morality or in case of plagiarism. Let there be no miserable carping at misprints & trifling errors but treat the book as a whole. At the present moment would be readers are simply bewildered: some reviewers have the book itself out of sight & proceed to write an original article upon the subject it talks of!

5th. Special Reviewing. In addition to the Literary article let there be an article reviewing the Speeches of the Month not from a political, a party point of view, but as efforts of oratory. This would be a complete novelty: & a most interesting one. While Parliament was sitting there would be plenty of news such as Gladstone, Disraeli, etc etc to afford subject matter. When Parliament is not sitting there are still endless public meetings from which selections could be made. We are fast becoming a speech making nation; no event can pass without speeches – and it is a matter of some importance that an effort should be made to introduce better taste into speeches. The greater number are slovenly in grammar, deficient in point, & fail to convey any lasting meaning to the hearer. There is a total lack of elegance in form: it is a misery to listen, still worse to make them in print. We speak as much nowadays, & every man is as likely to be called upon as in the famous days of Athens, but our oratory is – there is no end to describe it. And only from want of study. Efforts are made to infuse some artistic taste into the masses by means of South Kensington: why should not speeches be made artistic & effective. There need be little difficulty in criticising – there are acknowledged canons & authorities: though allowance must be made for modern circumstances.

6th. Stories of the Day: If further novelty be needed – though I almost

think such a magazine as I have briefly indicated could be better without tales, & likely to achieve a strong position without them – yet there is an idea in novel-writing which has never yet been attempted. It is to write a story the principal events in which shall occur at places upon which public attention is fixed, as in the Herzegovina, in India (while the Prince is there) etc: & the principal actors in which should be present at those great incidents which attract readers for months, as the Ashanti expedition. This appears at first sight impossible but after consideration will be found not so difficult. First of all the writer – perhaps two writers could accomplish it best in concert – must get their leading characters well sketched out – also their plot & the general drift of the tale. The 40 or more chapters should be sketched in outline – as Dumas used to. Then there is simply the Local Colouring – which must be supplied by reading up upon the places, & incidents. One writer in fact could get the Local Colouring ready while the other worked out the story. I am confident that I could do it myself & there are plenty of authors who possess ten times the strength & facility I can lay claim to. It could be a bold and striking innovation. Readers would follow the heroine at the taking of Comassie – within a week or two of the actual event – with intense interest. It could be quite as true to act as the hastily sketched daubs of special citation in weekly papers.

I think such a magazine could achieve a great popularity. Size & price etc. are best decided by practicalness.

Phase Shifting[#]

Amal El-Mohtar

Today I took this weight against my lungs
to a wooded place, where the trees dripped mist
from their leaves and needles' tips; the earth
was a moist mess of fallen things; the smell
of green and brown, wet and wind,
wound through me, and met resistance — pushed
until I, too, stood like the trees, and dripped
what condensation I could no longer bear,
and dreamt of sinking roots into the ground,
that this ache might pass from me into the dark,
might feed some creature hungering for salt,
so that I, too, in standing like the trees,
might remember how to lift my head again.

[#] This was the winning entry for the Richard Jefferies Society Poetry Competition, 2012. The poem on p.8 was the runner up; that on p.9 was highly commended.

Curator of Ammonites

Jill Sharp

He stores his shoal of specimens
away from light and air,
warm shallow waters' ancient denizens

each to its separate drawer
in halls of hardwood cabinets,
labelling where and by whose fingers
every foetus-curl was prized from the layers
of mother-rock, unfathomable ages
for which these whorls hold evidence.

Once they were serpent-stones, snakes
trapped in rock
by heroic saints.

treasured for luck.
Now he explores
the pearlised chambers' subtle logic,

grown in immaculate proportion
by creatures who survived
the changing eons' mass extinctions.

easing onward with each lunar cycle
into a greater space, using the emptied
structures of the past for buoyancy

But once unearthed, and left untended,
he's seen them moulder,
crumble to nothing in his hands.

It's only he who may preserve
whatever secret, held in these dark vaults,
minds of a different order

might unlock. And so, after the visitors
have gone, the factsheets filed,
he'll pour a basin of warm shallow water,
bathe each one gently as a newborn child.

Stugged

Jos Smith

'Dartmoor: richer in its bowels than in its face thereof'
- Tristram Risdon

Falling asleep in a horseshoe turf-tie
under a wind-flat khaki bivouac,
all the soldier can think about is
the give of moss underfoot as if he's falling.

It lives in the body like an echo:
that crunch and the weight of him
dropping through the step.
He thinks of the joke
about a man they found in the mire
by his hat, of his view
through the peat-black dreamscape below,
its half swallowed hawthorns and their
bright, strangled roots, its boulders
like teeth gone stray through the flesh.
A dream of shotguns overhead, blasts
given down through the legs of a man,
the unthinkable speed of lead
crying out through the sky.
A dream of the rhythm
of shoed hooves thumping,
of muffled voices and the sudden,
sharp noise of dogs baying at a burrow.

Soon deep silence
like an aura packed in the dark.
The muddled skeleton of a cow curled up,
afloat in a congealed night sky
like an idea laid to rest in the back of the mind.
Bangles and brooches and knotted gold
glinting, lost in the prickling flesh
of long-decayed heather like stars in the pools
that remember what we were never here to see.
And the soldier is sleeping now, with the cow
and the drowned noise of the dogs

still ringing in the mouth of the burrow,
fast asleep in the mind of the moor with the man
who is not there, who has gone down now,
off through the dark below his hat.

'Stugged' is a Dartmoor dialect term for being stuck in a bog.
A 'turf-tie' is where farmers would cut their peat.

Women in the Field

Professor Roger Ebbatson

Professor Ebbatson presented this paper for a Richard Jefferies Society Study Day held on 28 July 2012 at the Richard Jefferies Museum.

In *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845), Friedrich Engels offered a powerful account of current agricultural conditions, noting in particular how competition and large-scale farming operations now obliged the field-workers ‘to hire themselves as labourers to the large farmers or the landlords’.¹ The ending of the Napoleonic Wars led to a lowering of wages and consequent agricultural distress which was scarcely mitigated by the new Corn Laws. The symbiotic and patriarchal relation between master and man (and woman) disappeared, with the result that, as Engels writes, ‘farmhands have become day-labourers’, being employed ‘only when needed’, and thus often remaining unemployed ‘for weeks together, especially in winter’ (WCE, 287). The inception of the harsh New Poor Law, together with ‘the constant extension of farming on a large scale’ in the wake of enclosure, the introduction of threshing and other machines, and the employment of women and children, would inevitably lead to a widespread ‘disorganisation of the social fabric’ (WCE, 287, 288). Engels’ diagnosis inevitably focused upon the 1830s, with the incendiary ‘Swing’ riots and anti-Corn Law agitation; whilst there was an economic recovery in the countryside after this critical juncture, the 1870s saw the onset of the Great Depression which would stretch into Edwardian times. A succession of wet summers in the 1870s and early 1880s affected harvest yields and promoted pneumonia in cattle and foot-rot in sheep, whilst refrigerated shipping began to bring imports of wheat and mutton, cheese and bacon, which affected the domestic market. Increased reliance on mechanisation and shifting patterns of land-use reduced the aggregate demand for labour throughout the period. The keynote of these trends, therefore, was the permanent existence of a new ‘surplus population’ which lived by hiring out its labour, an important fraction of which comprised women field-labourers. The overall impact of such changes was later succinctly summarised by Marx himself: ‘By the nineteenth century, the very memory of the connection between the agricultural labourer and communal property had, of course, vanished’.²

¹ Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (London: Panther Books, 1969), 286. Subsequently cited in the text as WCE.

² Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, tr. B. Fowkes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 889.

How it rained
When we worked at Flintcomb-Ash,
And could not stand upon the hill
Trimming swedes for the slicing-mill,
The wet washed through us – splash, splash, splash:
How it rained!

How it snowed
When we crossed from Flintcomb-Ash
To the Great Barn for drawing reed,
Since we could nowise chop a swede. –
How it snowed!

How it shone
When we went from Flintcomb-Ash
To start at dairywork once more
In the laughing meads, with cows three-score,
And pails, and songs, and love – too rash:
How it shone!³

Thomas Hardy's poem, which refracts or condenses scenes from *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), raises crucial issues relating to voice, agency and gender ideology in the representation of female rural labour in the nineteenth century. Expressive of a deep sympathy for the 'calvary of labour' experienced by Tess, Marian and the other former milkmaids, the poem attempts to inhabit a female self whilst retaining a sense of distance consonant with a middle-class readership. The poet, for instance, eschews the kind of dialect speech patterns which would inform the language of this class-fraction in order to offer a telling but external picture of female labour. In her exemplary study of the 19C female rural labourer, Karen Sayer demonstrates how, in the late-Victorian period of the agricultural Great Depression, 'working women were construed as a threat to English labouring men's jobs, wages, and liberty, in other words, as a threat to their masculinity'. Certainly the Agricultural Labourers' Union (from which women were debarred), established in 1872, promulgated a programme of discouraging women's field labour, and their newspaper looked to the day when the labourer's wife was 'no longer a drudge in the fields, but a managing, economical housewife'.⁴ Although, as Sayer demonstrates, female workers were politically active and took part in strikes and related protests, with some exceptions their voices were muffled and their participation 'remained

³ Thomas Hardy, 'We Field-Women', *The Complete Poems*, ed. J. Gibson (London: Macmillan, 1976), 881.

⁴ Karen Sayer, *Women of the Fields* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 125, 126.

largely hidden'.⁵ Nonetheless, actions such as the 1867 strike by Oxfordshire women day labourers, or their 1873 intervention against black-legs in the same county, meant that, in Sayer's terms, 'the dominant definitions of masculinity and femininity were called into question...as were the supposed organic class relations in the countryside'.⁶ Whether in the form of officially endorsed parliamentary reports, journalistic accounts or individual social analyses, however, it remained the case throughout the period that women field labourers possessed virtually no voice of their own, their situation being primarily represented, debated and analysed by paternalist male 'authorities'. In addition it is clear that, in the late-nineteenth century overall, as Alan Armstrong observes, 'the role of women was becoming confined to home-making', and that in the field their role was increasingly limited 'to subsidiary tasks such as gathering and binding'.⁷

The issue of the (mis)representation of the late-Victorian female country labourer raises key questions of motivation and perspective which may be illustrated with reference to two of the leading male authors on rural affairs at this juncture. Richard Jefferies first came to prominence with a series of letters to *The Times* on agricultural matters in the early 1870s, and in a subsequent essay published in the *Graphic* in 1875 he dealt specifically with the question of 'Women in the Field'. This piece offers a naturalistic and telling description of the women's working conditions:

The cold clods of earth numb the fingers as they search for the roots and weeds. The damp clay chills the feet through thick-nailed boots, and the back grows stiff with stooping. If the poor woman suffers from the rheumatisms so common among the labouring class, such a day as this will make every bone in her body ache.⁸

As Jefferies depicts them, the field-women are impervious to the natural beauty of spring, the woods 'carpeted with acres upon acres of the wild hyacinth, or bluebell', the nightingale 'in the hazel copse, the skies full of larks' (WF, 170). Indeed, being virtually illiterate, the woman 'can call up no beautiful thoughts' with the result, according to Jefferies, that 'she cannot see, that is, appreciate or feel with, the beauty with which she is surrounded' (*ibid.*). The male anxiety surrounding rural female sexuality surfaces in Jefferies' analysis

⁵ *ibid.*, 128.

⁶ *ibid.*, 129.

⁷ Alan Armstrong, *Farmworkers* (London: Batsford, 1988), 123.

⁸ Richard Jefferies, *Landscape and Labour*, ed. J. Pearson (Bradford-on-Avon: Moonraker Press, 1979), 168. Subsequently cited in the text as WF.

when, remarking upon summer hay-making, he informs his readers that ‘much mischief is done by the indiscriminate mixing of the sexes’, and adds, ‘the language of the hay-field is not that of pastoral poetry’ (WF, 171). But he also emphasises here the unhealthy nature of the work in ‘the blazing heat of the long summer day’, a stress of labour whose ‘effects are visible in the thin frame, the bony wrist, the skinny arm showing the sinews, the rounded shoulders and stoop, the wrinkles and lines upon the sunburnt faces’ (WF, 171). Yet the women need the work, but technology is inexorably altering conditions and reducing the level of casual labour; as Jefferies remarks of the women, ‘machinery has taken their employment away’. His solution, marked by an unconscious paternalism, is to conclude that young country girls now being taught in the new village schools should be provided ‘with situations as domestic servants, for whom there is an increasing demand’ (WF, 171). Elsewhere, Jefferies would describe the ‘excessive and continuous labour’ of the harvest field, saying it was remarkable ‘how the women endure it’:

The woman’s bare neck is turned to the colour of tan; her thin muscular arms bronze right up to the shoulder. Short time is allowed for refreshment; right through the hottest part of the day they labour. It is remarkable that none, or very few, cases of sunstroke occur. Cases of vertigo and vomiting are frequent, but pass off in a few hours. Large quantities of liquor are taken to sustain the frame weakened by perspiration.⁹

Jefferies notes that in winter ‘there is nothing for women to do’, and also maintains that they ‘never or rarely milk now’, but ‘in arable districts the women do much work, picking couch grass - a tedious operation - and hoeing’ (TF, 94). In his authoritative account of the agricultural scene, *Hodge and His Masters* (1880), Jefferies once again avers that the women ‘do not find much work in the fields during the winter’, and he adds:

Now and then comes a day’s employment with the threshing-machine when the farmer wants a rick of corn threshed out. In pasture or dairy districts some of them go out into the meadows and spread the manure. They wear gaiters, and sometimes a kind of hood for the head. If done carefully, it is hard work for the arms - knocking the manure into small pieces by striking it with a fork swung to and fro smartly.

In sum, he claims ‘the number of women working in the fields is much less than was formerly the case’, and notes that ‘there are signs

⁹ Richard Jefferies, *The Toilers of the Field* (1892) (London: MacDonald Futura, 1981), 88. Subsequently cited in the text as TF.

that female labour has drifted to the towns quite as much as male'.¹⁰ The physical cost to the field-women who remain is again tellingly indicated in Jefferies' powerful essay, 'One of the New Voters':

Look at the arm of a woman labouring in the harvest-field – thin, muscular, sinewy, black almost, it tells of continual strain. After much of this she becomes pulled out of shape, the neck loses its roundness and shows the sinews, the chest flattens. In time the women find the strain of it tell severely.¹¹

A similar documentary realism is deployed in the short-story, 'The Field-Play' (1883), a tale of rural seduction which notably eschews the portentous symbolism of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. The narrative is split into two parts, 'Uptill-a-Thorn' and 'Rural Dynamite', the central figure, Dolly, being presented at the outset as a 'good-looking, careless hussy' who, at harvest-time, boldly cultivates the company of the men, to the disapproval of her fellow female labourers:

The women accused her of too free a carriage with the men; she replied by seeking their company in the broad glare of the summer day. They laughed loudly, joked, but welcomed her; they chatted with her gaily; they compelled her to sip from their ale as they paused by the hedge. By noon there was a high colour on her cheeks; the sun, the exercise, the badinage had brought it up.¹²

Dolly is the focus of attraction for Big Mat, 'a powerful fellow, big-boned, big everywhere, and heavy-fisted' (LF, 25), who kisses her in full view of the labouring crowd, but she is also admired by the farmer's son, Mr Andrew, who is attracted by 'those soft brown eyes, that laughing shape'. Andrew however remains 'too knowing of town cunning and selfish hardness to entangle himself' (LF, 26). After high summer in the fields, a significant change is perceived in Dolly, who displays symptoms of ill-health: 'There were dark circles round her eyes, her chin drooped to her breast; she wrapped herself in a shawl in all the heat' (LF, 28). Although she eventually recovers 'something of her physical buoyancy, her former light-heartedness never returned', and it seems 'as if her spirit had suffered some great wrong' (ibid.). By the next harvest, Dolly is living with Mat, 'unhappily not as his wife', and there is now 'a child wrapped in a red shawl with her in the field', and 'placed under the shocks while she worked' (LF, 29). Mat takes to drink, hits Dolly and puts out one of her eyes. On encountering her

¹⁰ Richard Jefferies, *Hodge and His Masters*, ed. H. Williamson (London: Methuen, 1937), 24, 25.

¹¹ Richard Jefferies, *The Open Air* (London: Dent, n.d.), 106.

¹² Richard Jefferies, *The Life of the Fields* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1908), 23. Subsequently cited as LF.

again in the village, Mr Andrew witnesses a shocking transformation:

The stoop, the dress which clothed, but responded to no curve, the sunken breast, and the sightless eye, how should he recognise these. This ragged, plain, this ugly, repellent creature – he did not know her. (LF, 29)

Jefferies closes this first part with a resonantly metaphorical reflection, which speaks eloquently of the vicissitudes of rural labour:

The poppies came and went and went once more, the harvest moon rose yellow and ruddy, all the joy of the year proceeded, but Dolly was like a violet over which a wagon-wheel had rolled. The thorn had gone deep into her bosom. (LF, 30)

The second section, 'Rural Dynamite', is largely taken up with what Jefferies concedes is 'a long digression' on rick-burning (LF, 40), and Big Mat is convicted of arson and imprisoned, whilst the man who identified him and who is Dolly's brother, drinks away his reward and dies of alcoholic poisoning. Dolly, who is pregnant again, is now driven to 'the same workhouse in which her brother had but just died'. She survives, 'utterly broken, hollow-chested, a workhouse fixture', and is employed in the institutional laundry. Jefferies closes his account on an elegiac note:

This was the girl who had lingered in the lane to help the boy pick watercress, to gather a flower, to listen to a thrush, to bask in the sunshine. Open air and green fields were to her life itself. Heart miseries were always better borne in the open air. How just, how truly scientific, to shut her in a steaming wash-house! (LF, 42)

Jefferies' general conclusions on this vexed topic offer a sympathetic and yet revealingly ambivalent summing-up of female field-labour:

The position of agricultural women is a painful one to contemplate, and their lives full of hardships; but field-labour cannot be fairly accused as the cause of the evils they endure. Their strength is overstrained in the cornfield; but what can you do? It is their gold-mine – their one grand opportunity of getting a little money...Farm-labour is certainly to be preferred to much of the work that women do in the manufacturing districts. At least there is no overcrowding; there is plenty of fresh air, and the woman who works in the field looks quite as robust and healthy as her sister sitting all day in a confined factory. (TF, 103)

Thomas Hardy also undertook a consideration of these issues in his 1883 essay on 'The Dorsetshire Labourer', where he suggests that, because of increased mobility in the countryside, female workers 'have, in many districts, acquired the rollicking air of factory hands'.¹³

¹³ Thomas Hardy, 'The Dorsetshire Labourer', in *Hardy: Personal Writings*, ed. H. Orel (London: Macmillan, 1967), 181. Subsequently cited in the text as DL.

As Hardy observes, female labour is specifically required for turnip-hacking in winter, for hay-making in summer and also for threshing the corn. As regards the latter he remarks, 'Not a woman in the county but hates the threshing-machine', and he goes on:

The dust, the din, the sustained exertion demanded to keep up with the steam tyrant, are distasteful to all women but the coarsest. I am not sure whether, at the present time, women are employed to feed the machine, but some years ago a woman had frequently to stand just above the whizzing wire drum, and feed from morning to night – a performance for which she was quite unfitted. (DL, 187)

Hardy describes the dizzying effects of such labour upon a 'thin, saucer-eyed woman of fifty-five' who was so disorientated she wandered around the fields 'bewildered and terrified, till three o'clock in the morning' (*ibid.*). The essay's judiciously neutral posture takes on a more apocalyptic tone in Hardy's fictionalisation of this passage when, in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, he depicts the operations of the steam threshing-machine on the bleak upland farm at Flintcomb-Ash:

Close under the eaves of the stack, and as yet barely visible was the red tyrant that the women had come to serve – a timber-framed construction, with straps and wheels appertaining – the threshing-machine, which, whilst it was going, kept up a despotic demand upon the endurance of their muscles and nerves.¹⁴

The machine's operations are directed by an 'indistinct figure' dressed in black, his engine functioning as 'the *primum mobile* of this little world'. The engine-man, 'a sooty and grimy embodiment of tallness', who speaks 'in a strange northern accent', has strayed into the southern landscape 'with which he had nothing in common, to amaze and to discompose its aborigines'. He is, the narrator observes, 'in the agricultural world, but not of it', travelling from farm to farm because 'as yet the steam threshing-machine was itinerant in this part of Wessex' in 'the service of his Plutonic master'. Despite the resistance of those field-labourers who, the narrator remarks, 'hated machinery', the work proceeds apace, 'the inexorable wheels continuing to spin, and the penetrating hum of the thresher to thrill to the very marrow all who were near the revolving wire cage'. It is the 'ceaselessness of the work', Hardy writes, which tries Tess so 'severely, and began to make her wish she had never come to Flintcomb-Ash' (TD, 315-16) – a response intensified by her harassment at the hands of both the sexually predatory Farmer Groby and of Alec d'Urberville. K.D.M. Snell, in his authoritative study of nineteenth-century labour,

¹⁴ Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, ed. S.Gatrell and J.Grindle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 315. Subsequently cited in the text as TD.

states categorically that 'it would have been very unusual, if not unheard of, to find women attending threshing machines in the late 1870s or 1880s (as in *Tess*)'.¹⁵ This claim might however be counterbalanced by Pamela Horn's observation as to how, in addition to the regular male workforce, 'most farmers would also employ some women – usually on a temporary or seasonal basis to help with weeding, stone-picking, haymaking, harvesting, potato-picking and similar tasks'.¹⁶ Although some of the old men at Flintcomb-Ash reminisce nostalgically about 'past days', 'when they had been accustomed to thresh with flails on the oaken barn-floor' (TD, 316), in the earlier scenes of turnip-hacking Hardy is at pains to stress the servitude of the women's hand-labour in a hundred-acre field significantly scarred with flints with 'phallic shapes':

The upper half of each turnip had been eaten off by the livestock, and it was the business of the two women to grub up the lower or earthy half of the root with a hooked fork called a hacker, that it might be eaten also. Every leaf of the vegetable having already been consumed the whole field was in colour a desolate drab; it was a complexion without features...The sky wore, in another colour, the same likeness; a white vacuity of countenance with the lineaments gone. So these two upper and nether visages confronted each other, all day long the white face looking down on the brown face, and the brown face looking up at the white face, without anything standing between them but the two girls crawling over the surface of the former like flies. (TD, 277)

Snell has trenchantly queried the accuracy of the depiction of field-labour in Hardy, claiming that 'the novels rarely enter seriously and sympathetically into the area of labourers' values, priorities, and subjective experience, and are revealingly reticent on the actual conditions of life in Dorset'.¹⁷ The complexity of working-class life on the land, low wages, religious nonconformity, political beliefs, unionism and class division are, in his view, masked 'by a romanticising and pastoral gloss' which is 'simplistically misrepresentative'.¹⁸ The motivation behind this evasive portrayal of real conditions is traced by Snell to Hardy's class snobbery, to his fatalistic temperament, and to his position as a 'detached and educated member of the Dorset market-town middle or professional

¹⁵ K.D.M.Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 378.

¹⁶ Pamela Horn, *Labouring Life in the Victorian Countryside* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1976), 69.

¹⁷ Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor*, 392.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, 392.

class' which led to his stereotyping of the rural poor.¹⁹ The class issue is a significant one in this body of writing, and Hardy's 'intermediate' position was characteristic also of Richard Jefferies. As Jeremy Hooker has observed, the 'insecurity' of Jefferies' class identity is ascribable to his status '*between* the labourers and the farmers, and *between* the agricultural world and his urban, middle-class readership'.²⁰ Snell's overall argument is worth pondering, but pays perhaps too little attention to aesthetic considerations in the shaping and nuance of Hardy's writing. Furthermore, Snell's notation of the way in which male labour 'came more to dominate economic production' whilst women 'became relegated to more strictly domestic functions'²¹ is countered by Hardy's eloquently understated remark that 'to stand working slowly in a field, and feel the creep of rainwater, first in legs and shoulders, then on hips and head, then at back, front, and sides, and yet to work on till the leaden light diminishes...demands a distinct modicum of stoicism, even of valour' (TD, 278). It is in this extreme situation that Marian movingly points out to Tess 'a gleam of a hill within a few miles o'Froom Valley'", reminding the girls of happier sunlit times at Talbothays Dairy.²²

In what would amount to his final summation of the agricultural scene, submitted to Rider Haggard for inclusion in his wide-ranging study, *Rural England* (1902), Hardy confirmed that up to the middle of the nineteenth century the field-worker's condition was 'in general one of great hardship', whilst by contrast in the early Edwardian period 'life is without exception one of comfort, if the most ordinary thrift be observed'. There were nonetheless other changes, he noted, 'which are not so attractive', the labourers being 'more and more migratory', and in consequence 'a vast amount of unwritten folk-lore' has sunk 'into eternal oblivion'. Hardy proceeds:

I cannot recall a single instance of a labourer who still lives on the farm which he was born, and I can only recall a few who have been five years on their present farm. Thus, you see, there being no continuity of information, the names, stories, and relics of one place being speedily forgotten under the incoming facts of the next.

Hardy goes on, finally, to comment on the large-scale 'migration to the towns' and the decline of the life-holding principle in rural villages which has led to a state characterised by 'the uncertainties of a

¹⁹ *ibid.*, 399.

²⁰ Jeremy Hooker, *Writers in a Landscape* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996), 28.

²¹ Snell, *Annals*, 404.

²² For a fuller reading of this scene see Roger Ebbatson, 'Prophetic Landscapes: Thomas Hardy and Richard Jefferies', in *Moment of Earth*, ed. C. Meredith (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2007), 114-134.

wandering career'.²³

It is thus clear that the representation of field-women here and elsewhere in Hardy and Jefferies tends to conform to the stereotypes identified by Karen Sayer: the dairymaid or milkmaid offering 'an important category of normative femininity', whilst women's field labour was to be seen, in the terms of a commentator in the *Quarterly Review* in 1867, as 'essentially degrading to the female character'.²⁴ It is generally held that women's field labour noticeably diminished in the later nineteenth century, and this is confirmed by Flora Thompson, who recalls former times in Oxfordshire, when 'there had been a large gang of field women, lawless, slatternly creatures, some of whom had thought nothing of having four or five children out of wedlock'. However, she notes that in the 1880s 'A few women still did field work', not alongside the men, 'but at their own special tasks, weeding and hoeing, picking up stones, and topping and tailing turnips and mangel; or, in wet weather, mending sacks in a barn'.²⁵ Until the late 1860s, much of the labour force in the countryside was composed of 'gang' work, casual labour done by women and children. As Beth Schoenfeld argues, there were three key factors which altered this state of affairs: 'the decline in the number of casual and/or migrant workers, wholesale depopulation of rural areas, and...the introduction of field machinery'.²⁶ This body of writing, overtly sympathetic and responsive as it is to the lives and working conditions of the 'women of the field', unconsciously refracts relations of dominance and subordination between the sexes and between classes. The contradictions inherent in the ideological practices and complex class positions of the two writers reflect tensions in the wider social formation, not least in relation to issues of gender. Their resonant imaginative response to the question of rural labour, in the blindness of its insight, remains unaware of or unreceptive to Marx's dictum that 'the seller of labour-power, like the seller of any other commodity, realises its exchange-value and parts with its use-value'. The representations of female labour examined here, that is to say, serve an ideological agenda which enables a paradoxically simultaneous revelation and masking of the realities of female labour in nineteenth-century rural England.

²³ Thomas Hardy's *Public Voice*, ed. M. Millgate (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 182, 183, 184.

²⁴ Cited in Sayer, 104.

²⁵ Flora Thompson, *Lark Rise to Candleford* (London: Oxford University Press, 1979), 46.

²⁶ Lois Beth Schoenfeld, *Dysfunctional Families in the Wessex Novels of Thomas Hardy* (New York: University Press of America, 2005), 201.

Richard Jefferies: The Nature Writer as Innocent Adam

Professor Norman Chaney

When the Lord created the heavens and appointed the foundations of the earth his creation included an earthly garden that reflected Paradise. The Lord enjoyed walking in the garden in the cool of the evening, sometimes conversing with the two humans he had placed there as its original inhabitants. It was a sad day when the Lord discovered that the two humans had broken his rule not to eat the fruit of a particular tree. He did not have to give a reason for this rule. After all, it was his garden, his tree, and his rule. It was even a sadder day when an angel of the Lord escorted the two humans out of the garden for having broken the Lord's rule. "Some retard tears they dropped," Milton tells us at the end of *Paradise Lost*, "but wip'd them soon;/The world was all before them, where to choose/Their place of rest, and Providence thir guide;/They hand in hand with wand'ring steps and slow,/Through Eden took thir solitary way" (Book XII, 645-649).

Our original parents lost the garden, but human life, as the biblical story continues, involves a circuitous journey. In sending Adam and Eve forth from the garden, the Lord endowed them with a curiosity that made them seekers of a lost happiness in a world of pain, sickness, and death. At the end of the circuitous journey, the writer of Revelation suggests, the children of Adam and Eve, the blistering experiences of history suffered, will return to the garden as the penultimate stage of their journey back to the Heavenly Paradise from whence they originally derived. In that Heavenly Paradise, "Every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea," will join in singing to their Creator "blessing and honour and glory and might forever and ever" (5:13).

In offering this summary version of the biblical creation story, I am reminded of T. S. Eliot's words: "That was a way of putting it—not very satisfactory;/A periphrastic study in a worn-out poetical fashion,/Leaving one still with the intolerable wrestle with words and meanings" ("East Coker" 125). It is widely held in our time that the story of creation encapsulated in the Bible is spent. The philosopher Charles Taylor reflects that with developments in science over the last half millennium the biblical story of a Creator who initiates and oversees all temporal and physical reality is "hard to understand, or even imagine" (327).

The biblical writers did not know, as we know today, that we live on a planet circling a medium-sized star at the outer edge of a spiral galaxy. But despite their lack of scientific knowledge, the biblical writers in telling their story of creation expressed a truth that is timeless. That truth is that we humans did not make the universe, do not own it, and do not control its destiny.

The biblical writers were theologians who conceived that the universe could only be explained as the handiwork of a generous God who was the reference point for all reality. When they introduced Adam into their story, however, they did not portray him as a fellow theologian. They portrayed him rather as a theological innocent. In his original state, Adam only knew that he was *here*, an earthbound creature in an environment that seemed to be more in favour of his existence than against it.

Several decades ago in his book *The American Adam*, the literary scholar R.W.B. Lewis traced the theme of Adam in the American literature of the nineteenth century. Lewis maintained that such seminal American writers as Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman identified imaginatively with the innocent Adam of Genesis. They aspired to look upon the bright new garden of the American world with eyes that were unclouded by preconceived categories of theological thought. I have often recalled Lewis's book in my reading of an English nature writer of the nineteenth century, Richard Jefferies (1848-1887). Jefferies is as much an innocent Adam as his American counterparts. But unlike them, he is a writer who is relegated to the margins of literary history.

As a professional writer, Jefferies earned only a modest living for his wife and children. With the noteworthy exception of his novel *Bevis: The Story of a Boy*, Jefferies' fiction did not attract a popular reading public in his own lifetime, nor has it since. To the extent he is remembered today, it is typically for his autobiography and for informational essays on themes of rural life and nature that were first published in newspapers and journals and later gathered and published under various book titles.

Jefferies was born near the old market town of Swindon, eighty miles west of London in Wiltshire County. The environs in which he grew up were rural. His father was a farmer, but from childhood upward Jefferies had no liking for the practical duties of farming. "He was derided in his father's house," says one of his biographers, "upbraided for idleness and stupidity; considered 'looney' by the neighbours" (Williamson 7).

Jefferies' reputation for lunacy stemmed from his habit of doing

what he liked rather than what others expected of him. He especially liked reading imaginative literature and taking solitary walks in the countryside. During these walks he took minute notice of rural customs and the subtle things of nature. His great gift as a writer was his ability to observe in nature what others might miss or discard, and bring it to the attention of his readers as something remarkable. The following passage, in which Jefferies describes a grain of wheat, is typical of his power of imaginative observation:

If you will look at a grain of wheat you will see that it seems folded up: it has crossed its arms and rolled itself up in a cloak, a fold of which forms a groove, and so gone to sleep. If you look at it some time, . . . you can almost trace a miniature human being in the oval of the grain. It is narrow at the top, where the head would be, and broad across the shoulders, and narrow again down towards the feet; a tiny man or woman has wrapped itself round about with a garment and settled to slumber ("Walks in the Wheat-Fields" 121).

He goes further in the passage to suggest that the grain of wheat is "the actual flesh and blood of man." We eat it in the form of bread and it becomes one with us, we with it. "Transubstantiation," he remarks, "is a fact there" (122).

This allusion to the Christian doctrine of transubstantiation seems oddly out of place in a passage about a grain of wheat. Jefferies is not suggesting his fidelity to the doctrine, but is parodying it. And this is by no means the single instance in his work where he reveals an unsympathetic attitude toward religious orthodoxy and practice. In an essay titled "The Country Sunday," in which he draws on memories from his youth, he remarks sardonically on the folk of the Wiltshire countryside who dutifully made their way to church.

The hottest summer day or the coldest winter Sunday made no difference; they tramped through dust, and they tramped through slush and mire; they were pilgrims every week. A grimy real religion, as concrete and as much a fact as a stone wall; a sort of horse's faith going along the furrow unquestioning. (52)

Jefferies himself was temperamentally incapable of "going along the furrow unquestioning." Though imbued in his youth with biblical teachings, in his maturity he was exposed to the Darwinian evolutionary hypothesis that seemed to render obsolete the story of creation contained in the first chapters of Genesis. For him, as for many of his Victorian contemporaries, the Darwinian hypothesis represented a dividing line between an old way of thinking about the world of nature and a new way that had implications for removing any reference to a Creator. W. J. Keith, one of Jefferies' most thorough

interpreters, says:

Jefferies was a man who wanted to believe but could not, who found the empirical approach of science as unsatisfactory as the “high Priori Road” of revealed religion, who considered atheism as illogical as conventional Christianity but was unable to find peace in a vaguely sceptical agnosticism. (81)

In such a state of ambiguity as Keith describes, Jefferies was determined to think about the world of nature without the weight of previous thought – religious or scientific – dictating what *his* thought should be. “Instead of a set of ideas based on tradition,” he declared, “let me give the mind a new thought drawn straight from the wondrous present, direct this very hour” (*The Story of My Heart* 36).

Jefferies’ thought about the world of nature is never less bound to previous thought than in his autobiography, *The Story of My Heart*, a book of less than 150 pages that he worked at hit-and-miss over a period of eighteen years before publishing it in 1883. In one of its striking passages, he observes that

There is nothing human in the whole round of nature. All nature, all the universe that we can see, is absolutely indifferent to us, and except to us human life is of no more value than grass. If the entire human race perished at this hour, what difference would it make to the earth? What would the earth care? As much as for the extinct dodo, or for the fate of the elephant now going. (51-52)

Behind these words lies a question that Jefferies must have asked himself many times. Could he, on the basis of his personal familiarity with the world of nature, affirm a Creator who is occupied with the well being of his creatures? Jefferies had a particular abhorrence of toads. Of the toad, he says in disgust: “All the designless, formless chaos of chance-directed matter . . . squats there embodied in the pathway” (*Story* 53). To the age-old question of how the world of nature came to be Jefferies had no answer, but he had a sure sense that a benevolently purposeful Creator does not reign over a world where toads exist.

In the autobiography, Jefferies does not describe the course of his life chronologically. It is often not clear if information he offers about a particular event occurred before or after other events that he describes. The book has a random structure that reflects his shifting thoughts over the nearly two decades of its composition. His prime intention is to tell the story of his “heart,” a term that he uses interchangeably with such terms as *psyche*, *mind*, *soul*, and *spirit* to refer to his inner life.

In the opening chapter of the autobiography, Jefferies offers an

account of a revelatory experience that occurred to him when he was seventeen years old. One day when his heart was “parched for want of the rain of deep feeling,” his “mind arid and dry” (19), he took a three-mile walk to one of his favourite haunts, a place known among the natives of the Wiltshire countryside as Liddington Hill. “By the time I had reached the summit,” he recalls,

I had entirely forgotten the petty circumstances and the annoyances of existence. . . . I was utterly alone with the sun and the earth. Lying down on the grass, I spoke in my soul to the earth, the sun, the air, and the distant sea far beyond. I thought of the earth’s firmness—I felt it bear me up; through the grassy couch there came an influence as if I could feel the great earth speaking to me (20). . . . I hid my face in the grass, I was wholly prostrated, I lost myself in the wrestle, I was rapt and carried away. Becoming calmer, I returned to myself. . . . I did not then define, or analyse, or understand this. I see now that what I laboured for was soul-life, soul-nature, to be exalted, to be full of soul-learning (22).

Jefferies’ account of this experience does not contradict his insistence about nature’s indifference to humans. What he realizes from his experience on Liddington Hill, as he explicitly declares, is that nature is “always within” (*Story* 33). He does not spell out as a scrupulous thinker might what he means when he says nature is “always within.” Instead, he wraps his meaning in language that derives from the vocabulary of religion. In the following passage, he describes his experience when he engages the world of nature in “prayer.”

I prayed with the glowing clouds of sunrise and the soft light of the first star coming through the violet sky. At night with the stars, according to the season: now with the Pleiades, now with the Swan or burning Sirius, and broad Orion’s whole constellation, red Aldebaran, Arcturus, and the Northern Crown; with the morning star, the light-bringer, once now and then when I saw it, a white-gold ball in the violet-purple sky, or framed about with pale summer vapour floating away as red streaks shot horizontally in the east. . . . All the glory of the sunrise filled me with broader and furnace-like vehemence of prayer. (26-27)

This is not prayer intended for the hearing of a transcendent God. Neither is it prayer of adoration *to* nature. Prayer for Jefferies is an activity of the heart, in which he brings his whole attention to bear on the appearances of the world of nature. He speaks of “something more subtle than electricity” (*Story* 55) that he is aware of within himself when he is engaged in the activity of prayer. And after that activity, always came to him the desire, as he records,

That I might be like this; that I might have the inner meaning of the sun, the light, the earth, the trees and grass, translated into some growth of

excellence in myself, both of body and mind; greater perfection of physique, greater perfection of mind . . . ; that I might be higher in myself. (*Story* 60)

These words bring us closer to understanding what Jefferies means when he says that nature is “always within” (*Story* 33). He realized that the “inner meaning of the sun” is not in the sun. It is in the human being who brings attention to bear on the beauty and energy of the sun. In turning his face to the sun, in opening his heart to nature’s awesome energy, that energy in ways he did not understand entered him and became his own. I imagine that the biblical writers of Genesis could have done no better than Jefferies has done if they had attempted to describe the inner life of Adam at his nativity. When Adam first opened his eyes, it was not God whom he thought of. It was the wonders of the garden itself, which he lacked the theological tools to attribute to God.

When Jefferies’ publisher asked him to write a description of *The Story of My Heart* that would convey a sense of its contents to the public, he found it impossible to satisfy the request. He had said what he had to say in the way he had to say it, and readers would have to decide for themselves if the book was comprehensible. Afflicted with tuberculosis, Jefferies knew by his mid-thirties that he had little time to live. He published his autobiography under a doomsday edict to sum up insights he had achieved in a life dedicated to observing and writing about the world of nature.

Among his key insights is one he never expresses more directly than in an essay titled “Wild Flowers.” In the course of depicting and naming the wild flowers of his native landscape, he registers his frustration at trying to capture the world of nature in words. “It is like a story,” he writes, “that cannot be told because he who knows it is tongue-tied and dumb. Motions of hands, wavings and gestures, rudely convey the framework, but the finish is not there” (63). Here Jefferies expresses the insight that nature writing is just that: nature in words. For him, the individual human heart that is open to the world of nature is privy to “something more subtle than electricity” (*Story* 55) that words cannot convey.

The literary genre of nature writing has assumed a high profile in our environmental age. Literary scholars such as Lawrence Buell in his book *The Environmental Imagination*, and John Felstiner in his book *Can Poetry Save the Earth?* have brought to light writers both past and present who can help us to think freshly about the world of nature and the human presence within it. Jefferies, to my mind, is significantly one of these writers.

As far as we can see into cultures of the past, people have told grand stories about the origin and structure of the universe. The theological account of the creation in Genesis is one of these grand stories. Today's grand storytellers tend to be scientists. Jefferies, although neither theologian nor scientist, also tells a story of creation, not about how things came to be, but about how things that *are* have registered within his heart. In telling the story of his heart, he leads us to consider that the story of the creation is unfinished. The nature writer in every generation is faced anew—as Adam was—with the challenge to find “words and meanings” (Eliot, “East Coker” 125) adequate to the experience of being awake to the on-going life and miraculous beauty of this material world.

Works Cited

Buell, Lawrence. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap-Harvard University Press, 1995.

Eliot, T. S. *The Complete Poems and Plays: 1909-1950*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1952.

Felstiner, John. *Can Poetry Save the Earth? A Field Guide to Nature Poems*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Jefferies, Richard. “Country Sunday.” *Field and Hedgerow: Being the Last Essays*. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1892.

---. *The Story of My Heart*. London: Constable Publishers, 1947.

---. “Walks in the Wheat-Fields.” *Field and Hedgerow*. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1892.

---. “Wild Flowers.” *The Open Air*. London: Lutterworth Press, 1948.

Keith, W. J. *Richard Jefferies: A Critical Study*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965.

Lewis, R. W. B. *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century*. Chicago: Phoenix-The University of Chicago Press, 1958.

Milton, John. *Complete Poems and Major Prose*. Ed. Merritt Y. Hughes. New York: The Odyssey Press, 1957.

Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap-Harvard University Press, 2007.

Williamson, Henry. *Richard Jefferies: Selections of his Work with details of his Life and Circumstances, his Death and Immortality*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1937.

Imagining Archaeology: Nature and Landscape in the Work of Richard Jefferies

Part One

Rebecca Welshman

Presented as the Richard Jefferies Society Birthday Lecture
3 November 2012, Liddington Village Hall

Since archaeology began to develop as a discipline at the end of the eighteenth century, efforts to piece together the human past, in order to understand the present, have become a significant and popular part of human cultures worldwide. The popularity of archaeology as a wealthy man's hobby in the early nineteenth century established the study of antiquities both financially and culturally, and led to its wider appeal and appreciation. The growing inclination to excavate British sites was partly due to the influence of archaeological discoveries on the continent, such as Pompei in 1748.¹ Englishmen embarking on the Grand Tour returned with a flavour of the excitement and insight into national identity that excavation offered.² In his explorations of archaeological sites in Wiltshire, William Stukeley (1687–1765) precipitated a popular interest in antiquities. As Jefferies notes in *Jefferies' Land*, the size and ceremonial significance of the megalithic monuments of Wiltshire made them comparable with Egyptian temples.³

British archaeological sites were accessible to the public and their sense of history appealed to artists, authors, and landowners. The Wiltshire Downs had been used for horse racing and other sports for centuries. In Jefferies' time, archaeological sites functioned as public meeting places for sport and leisure pursuits. For example, a contributor to *Baily's Monthly Magazine of Sports and Pastimes* (1867), writing about a foxhunt, considers the beauty of a Roman castle as a setting:

On the highest part of the long ridge, or, as it may be termed, the watershed of these upland wastes, are situate the remains of a Roman castle. It consists of four banked mounds enclosing a couple of acres of fine

¹ James Dyer, *Discovering Archaeology in England and Wales* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2008), p. 8.

² Dyer, p. 10.

³ Richard Jefferies, *Jefferies' Land*, ed. by Grace Toplis (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent, 1896), p. 167.

sward, with two entrances and the usual vallum. In its general outline the ancient castrum remains perfect. A prettier place for a meeting on a fine day — commanding as it does, such a varied and beautiful prospect — cannot be seen, and as the first whip rode into the area, with the huntsman and hounds following, and the second whip in his place, the gay sight would have warmed the heart of the most unimpassioned spectator.⁴

The ‘varied and beautiful prospect’ of the archaeological setting heightens the aesthetic qualities of the traditional rural scene, and places it in within a grander, more historically informed context. The reference to the ‘general outline [of] the ancient castrum’ that has ‘remain[ed] perfect’ alludes not only to the archaeological form of the castle but also to the English lineage inherited from Roman occupation. The unique ancient setting for the traditional English sport stimulates the author’s archaeological imagination to conceive of a strong momentary sense of Englishness that ‘would have warmed the heart of the most unimpassioned spectator.’ Archaeology thus helped to furnish emergent ideas of sport with historical roots.

Archaeology rose to popularity in the periodical press alongside nature and rural pursuits, and in 1882 a reviewer of *The Antiquary* magazine in the *Saturday Review* wrote that ‘Archaeology has outlived ridicule, and become fashionable’.⁵ This formative time for archaeology gave rise to unprecedented levels of academic and wider interest in the subject. As expressed in an article in *The Sunday at Home*, ‘the nineteenth century has been marked by a vast access of knowledge concerning ancient life, its manners, customs, beliefs and civilisation’.⁶ Cecil Smith, keeper of the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities at the British Museum, described the 1870s – the decade when Jefferies’ career was taking shape – as a transitional and formative era for archaeology.⁷ In urban areas archaeological remains were discovered by accident during excavations for roads and foundations, and in rural areas through ploughing, excavations for railways, digging for chalk, or during alterations to the ground. For example, in 1884 Romano-British remains, along with dishes and vases, were discovered in rural Wiltshire by workmen who were

⁴ M.F.H., ‘Gone Away’, *Baily’s Monthly Magazine of Sports and Pastimes*, 1 March 1867, p. 31.

⁵ ‘*The Antiquary*’. *Saturday Review* 53 (1882), pp. 772–3.

⁶ George T. Stokes, ‘Recent Discoveries and the Christian Faith’, *The Sunday at Home: a family magazine for Sabbath reading*, 25 May 1889, pp. 325–328 (p. 325).

⁷ Cecil Smith, ‘Recent Archaeological Research’, *Archaeological Review*, July 1889, pp. 297–315 (p. 298).

levelling the ground at a racing establishment.⁸ The same article cites another discovery of a Roman altar at St. Swithin's Church, in the city of Lincoln, also made by workmen, who were digging foundations to the new church tower.⁹ Victorian progress, whether it was renovation, extension, or expansion, was disturbing ground — in a literal and metaphorical sense — at an unprecedented rate. These accidental discoveries informed archaeologists where to dig and raised new questions about the activities and nature of past human societies. Literary depictions of nature in ancient settings found a receptive audience in London papers such as the *Graphic* and the *Pall Mall Gazette*, to which Jefferies contributed.

At least until the mid nineteenth century the term 'archaeology' did not only relate to the recovery and examination of material objects as a means of illuminating the human past. It was widely used as an umbrella term to connect loosely associated ideas and interests, including collecting, anecdotal stories about the past, classical literature, bell rubbing, and Greek and Roman art. In 1851 Sir Daniel Wilson announced that archaeology had joined the 'circle of the sciences' and formally introduced the term 'prehistoric' into the English language.¹⁰ This recognition of a deeper, more complex chronology for the history of humankind made way for a new branch of archaeology, known as prehistory. That the earliest history of mankind was unaccompanied by written records was something that appealed to creative thinkers in both the sciences and the arts. The indeterminate expanse of prehistory motivated late-Victorians to identify and as far as possible reconstruct, a picture of how previous cultures lived and died. As Jefferies writes in 'The Commonest Thing in the World', published in the *Graphic* in 1875, tombs and caves as being significant 'chapters' of the human story: 'the vast caravan route, so to say, of the human race, from the sunrise to sunset, in cave, and mound, and river, the chipped flint ... The chapters are being slowly spelt out word by word, in caves, in tumuli, by stones and flints'.¹¹ Prehistory rapidly developed national importance and fifty years later, in 1872, was marked by the publication of Sir John

⁸ 'Discovery of Roman Remains in Wiltshire', *The Relinquiry: quarterly archaeological journal and review*, April 1884, p. 256.

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ See Sir Daniel Wilson, *The Archaeology and Prehistoric Annals of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Sutherland and Knox, 1851), p. xii.

¹¹ 'The Commonest Thing in the World', *Landscape and Labour*, ed. John Pearson (Bradford-on-Avon: Moonraker Press, 1979), p. 35.

Lubbock's *Prehistoric Times*.¹² Lubbock, who was an admirer of Jefferies' work, and was present at the unveiling of the bust of Jefferies in Salisbury Cathedral, passed the Ancient Monuments Protection Act of 1882.

As a naturalist whose deep appreciation of beauty led him to wander the landscapes around Coate, Jefferies noted evidences of former human life with interest. In 1867 he wrote to his Aunt Ellen that his agricultural homeland was 'a mine for an antiquary', and remarks on the numbers of unidentified earthworks and artefacts which would come to light through agricultural work. He has, he writes, noticed 'traces of former habitations, and former generations, in all directions—here Roman coins here British arrowheads—cannon balls, tumuli, camps', and that 'the country seems alive with the dead'.¹³ Jefferies' land includes the Iron Age hillforts, Liddington and Barbury castle, and the Ridgeway, the oldest known path in the world, which begins at Avebury, south of Swindon, and runs through Oxfordshire. The archaeology of Dorset and Wiltshire is characterised by stone circles, barrows, and earthworks, which have significant visual impact and provide ample opportunity for the enjoyment and study of nature. Hillforts harbour a diversity of species of plants and animals, from wild orchids, growing in the shelter of fosses, to birds of prey which seek the warm thermals above. For Jefferies, who was a keen walker, sensory experience deepened emotive engagement with these landscapes, linking his practical experience of archaeology with his imaginative interpretation of it. Such insights added valuable dimensions to Jefferies' thought and to his understanding of place itself.

From 1866–1873 Jefferies was researching and documenting the antiquities of Swindon and the local area for his histories of Malmesbury, Cirencester, and Swindon, which were published serially in the *North Wiltshire Herald*. At the time, the main topographical account of the antiquities of Swindon was *Wiltshire: the Topographical collections of John Aubrey 1659–70*, which Jefferies owned. This edition, revised by the Wiltshire archaeologist Canon Jackson, was published in 1862. Aubrey (1626–1697) was a pioneer archaeologist who recorded the existence of megalithic monuments in the south, including Avebury. From 1869–1872 Jefferies corresponded with

¹² Lubbock, a biologist, archaeologist, and Liberal politician, was one of the patrons of the fund for Jefferies' widow and children after he died, and became Lord Avebury after his campaign to preserve Avebury Rings in Wiltshire, the largest Stone Age site in Europe.

¹³ Richard Jefferies, *Letters to Aunt Ellen* (Oxon: Petton Books, 2011), p. 32.

Canon Jackson and Reverend Francis Goddard, who were both members of the Wiltshire Natural History and Archaeological Society. Jefferies' letter of introduction to Canon Jackson written on the 27 April 1869 asks for assistance in obtaining papers relating to the history of Cirencester, having learnt that Jackson was cataloguing papers in the library of the Marquis of Bath. Jefferies writes 'I too am an antiquarian', and notes that Jackson has subscribed to his two histories in the *North Wiltshire Herald*. In a letter to Rev. Goddard in September the same year, Jefferies writes that 'for some years past I have interested myself more or less in archaeology, and more particularly in the antiquities of my immediate neighbourhood'.¹⁴

When Jefferies returned from travelling on the continent in 1870 he had no money, was estranged from his family, and was seeking to establish himself as an author. Jefferies' letters to Jackson, only recently discovered, suggest that Jefferies may have considered archaeology as a potential way of achieving recognition as an author. In one letter, dated 21 May 1872, Jefferies refers to having read Jackson's work on John Aubrey and proposes to help him write an updated account of the archaeology of Wiltshire:

I have often wondered while looking through your work on Aubrey why you have not since extended that record so as to embrace the whole of North Wiltshire and so form in point of fact a history of this division. There are so many parishes Aubrey never visited. Your work is now out of print. If ever you should contemplate a re-issue on a more extended scale and if I could be of any use however slight in collecting material, I should be most happy.¹⁵

Jefferies goes on to suggest his suitability for this proposed project, noting his 'central position' and that being 'known to almost everyone' he has 'very good opportunities'. The final paragraph of the letter contains an account of some excavated treasure from Liddington church. Jefferies mentions a person who remembers seeing fifty coins and cites the event as 'unusual', reassuring Jackson that he is 'making enquiries with a view to elucidating the matter'. Jefferies continued to correspond with Jackson throughout 1872, as Jackson assisted him in deciphering Latin inscriptions from bell rubbings in the local area; part of the research Jefferies carried out for his genealogical account *A Memoir of the Goddard Family* (1873). In May 1872 a further letter to Jackson from Jefferies suggests that Jefferies was carrying out archaeological fieldwork on his behalf, mapping out key archaeological features of his local area. Jefferies writes that he

¹⁴ Unpublished letters, private collection.

¹⁵ The Royal Society of Antiquaries Manuscript Library.

has discovered Blackman's Barrow — a tumulus near Day House Lane at Coate, Swindon — and intends to open it. He mentions visiting the old road discovered near Aldbourne, noting that 'one of the most important particulars could be its direction'. Jefferies also refers to his 'idea' that Gipsy Lane, in the local parish of Chiseldon, was 'the remains of an old British Track' which led to the Iron Age hillfort, Barbury Castle, and noted further barrows and earthworks near the Marlborough Road.¹⁶ Jefferies was also the first to notice and record Coate Stone Circle; a ring of nine stones in the meadows on Day House Lane, which is no longer intact.

Jefferies' connections with local archaeologists culminated in a presentation to the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society in 1873 about the history of Swindon and its antiquities. John Chandler notes that Jefferies was an 'uncomfortable antiquary', not least because of the social hierarchy in which he found himself.¹⁷ Jefferies thus subsequently pursued his archaeological and topographical research alone, with a view to gaining notice as an author. In a letter to Oswald Crawford, editor of the *New Quarterly Magazine*, dated 1876, Jefferies expresses his desire to use his archaeological experience to write articles which were more than ordinary natural history — a series that would express his imaginative awareness of the topography and ancient character of the Coate area. Jefferies refers to his familiarity with the work of Charles Lyell, and to the shaping influence of geology on his perception of his home landscape:

There is at Coate a reservoir — it is sixty years old, and looks quite as a lake — of some eighty acres of water. I think I could write a whole book on that great pond. I mapped it, and laid down the shallows and sand-banks, when I was a schoolboy, and I learnt how to manage a sailing boat on it. Even the mussels slowly crawling on the bottom, I believe, have taught me something. You can trace the action of the rain and frost and the waves on its banks, just as Lyell¹⁸ delineates the effect of the ocean on our coast line; of course, on a smaller scale, but the illustration is perfect. You can trace the action of the brook which feeds it.¹⁹

Following the example of early antiquaries, many Victorian

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ John Chandler, 'An Uncomfortable Antiquary: Richard Jefferies and Victorian Local History', *The Richard Jefferies Society Journal* 5 (1996), pp.14-24.

¹⁸ Jefferies owned a copy of *An Introduction to Geology* by Robert Bakewell, 1813, signed 'R.Jefferies Coate' (Hugoe Matthews and Phyllis Treitel, *The Forward Life of Richard Jefferies* (Oxon: Petton Books, 1994), p. 81.

¹⁹ Oswald Crawford, 'Richard Jefferies: Field-Naturalist and Litterateur', *The Idler; an illustrated monthly magazine*, October 1898, pp. 289-301 (p. 295).

archaeologists mapped ancient landscapes with a view to identifying the size, location, and material condition of relics. These cartographical studies, with accompanying analysis, covered areas as large as that detailed in Robert Knox's book *Eastern Yorkshire*, published in 1855. For Jefferies, mapping his local areas afforded a means of more deeply understanding and experiencing the landscape, and the place of humans within it. In the process of authorship, Jefferies' fictional landscapes are mapped onto prehistoric landscapes, once intricately planned and understood by prehistoric communities. Camps, tumuli, and stone circles, which once functioned as ceremonial and trade routes connecting different parts of the country, feature in Jefferies' works as meeting places; sites of dramatic events; and places of solace.

In 'History of Swindon' Jefferies describes Wayland's Smithy, a Neolithic long barrow and chamber tomb site near Uffington, as a 'cave':

The country people call it Wayland Smith's cave, and tell a story of an invisible smith, who shoed travellers' horses, on condition of their laying a groat upon the altar-stone, and then retiring out of sight.²⁰

Jefferies' study of Wayland's has come to light through a newly discovered book in the Samuel Looker archive, titled *The Legend of Wayland Smith*, which he owned when living at Victoria Road, Swindon during the early 1870s.²¹ The inside pages are marked with Jefferies' pen and the book is on display at the Richard Jefferies Museum. In *Greene Ferne Farm* (1879) this monument becomes a 'room' in which Margaret spends the night.²²

Geoffrey awoke and leaned upon his arm; his first thought was of Margaret, and he looked towards the copse. All was still; then in the dawn the strangeness of that hoary relic of the past sheltering so lovely a form came home to him. Next he gazed eastwards [...] Out from the last fringe of mist shone a great white globe. Like molten silver, glowing with a lusciousness of light, soft and yet brilliant, so large and bright and seemingly so near — but just above the ridge yonder-shining with heavenly splendour in the very dayspring. He knew Eosphoros, the Light-Bringer, the morning star of hope and joy and love, and his heart went

²⁰ *Jefferies' Land*, ed. by Grace Toplis (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent, 1896), p. 129.

²¹ The book is signed 'R. Jefferies', Victoria Road, Swindon. 'Samuel Looker Collection', owned by the Richard Jefferies Society, 2011.

²² The 'dolmen' in which Margaret rests is likely to be Wayland rather than Devil's Den near Marlborough. The description of the monument as surrounded by deep 'narrow vales' and 'great cavernous coombes', and being situated within a copse of different species of tree, matches Wayland.

out towards the beauty and the glory of it. Under him the broad bosom of the earth seemed to breathe instinct with life, bearing him up, and from the azure ether came the wind, filling his chest with the vigour of the young day.²³



Wayland's Smithy in the nineteenth century before its reconstruction.
Photo reproduced from an information board at the site (16-12-12).

The combination of the natural setting and the subterranean human past that protectively conceals Margaret, inspires Geoffrey to consider the long human history of the spot in the light of the summer morning with what Roger Ebbatson terms a 'sensitive poetic realism'.²⁴ Archaeological references which appear in the novel include the references to 'flint-pits', which is an archaeological term used to describe the refuse heaps from prehistoric stone tool technologies. Felix's archaeological knowledge is evident in his anxiety when he observes labourers carelessly robbing a tumulus on the Downs:

"Don't disturb the skeleton!" cried Felix, anxious to make scientific notes of the interment; whether the grave was "orientated," or the knees drawn up to the chin; but in the scramble for the bones his voice was unheeded, and the skeleton was disjoined in an instant. The bones were as light as pith, ready to crumble to pieces and little better than dust, yet still retaining, as it were, a sketch of human shape.²⁵

After *Greene Ferne Farm* Jefferies produced some of his earliest

²³ *Greene Ferne Farm* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1880), pp. 162–3.

²⁴ Roger Ebbatson in Brian Morris, *Richard Jefferies and the Ecological Vision* (Victoria, BC: Trafford, 2006), p. 212.

²⁵ *Greene Ferne Farm*, p. 218.

articles about the Wiltshire landscape, which concern archaeology. These include 'The Wiltshire Downs', 'The Commonest Thing in the World', and 'The Old Mill'. 'The Monkbourn Mystery,' a short story published in *The New Monthly Magazine* (1876), mentions the phenomenon of 'unconscious psychic force', as proposed by the scientist Cox.²⁶ Strange rappings from the walls of a church, and the subsequent excavation of a hidden chamber, reveal the skeleton of a mediaeval medium who literally holds the lost title deeds to an heirloom (in a metal globe) in her hand. The story associates archaeological discovery with psychic resonance and implicitly imbues death with a sense of potential. The skull of the interred woman is analysed by Ernest, an anatomist, who concludes that 'she possessed extraordinary powers of an animal and subtle character [...] for I have never seen a skull so low in character except the famous Neanderthal head, which belonged to primitive man'.²⁷ This reference to the skull relates to debates of the 1870s concerning the discoveries of different sized skulls in British tumuli. Professor of Anatomy and Physiology at Oxford, George Rolleston, developed the idea in his *Bronze Barrows* (1877), written with William Greenwell, in which he concluded that there had existed a narrow-headed race that was physically and mentally inferior, and that this race had been swept away by the taller, stronger, broad-headed people with 'more favourably conditioned brains' who invaded from Scandinavia.²⁸ One of the key archaeological sites at the centre of these debates was the longbarrow, Belas Knap, in Gloucestershire after excavations in 1863 uncovered 12 skeletons placed around a circle of stones and ashes, with the remains of up to 38 individuals, all bearing a strange similarity in the shape of their skulls. Jefferies' notebooks suggest that he may have visited the longbarrow at Belas Knap — the site would have been within an hour's travelling distance of Swindon, where Jefferies lived until 1876, and even closer to Cirencester where he worked from 1870–1872. The notebook entry, dated 1887, which appears to be recalling a visit, reads 'Tumulus. Gloucester. The bones reared against the wall of colossal stone within – As if I could look back and feel *then*; the sunshine of *then*, and their life'.²⁹

In *Wild Life in a Southern County*, published four years later, Jefferies accounts the history of the Ridgeway through different

²⁶ Jefferies refers to 'the psychic force proved to exist by Sergeant Cox and his friends' in 'The Monkbourn Mystery', *New Monthly Magazine*, January 1876, p. 5.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁸ Julien Parsons, *British Archaeological Magazine*, February 2002 [online].

²⁹ *The Notebooks of Richard Jefferies*, ed. Samuel J. Looker (London: Grey Walls Press, 1948), p. 234.

archaeological epochs:

The origin of the track goes back into the dimmest antiquity: there is evidence that it was a military road when the fierce Dane carried fire and slaughter inland, leaving his nailed bark in the creeks of the rivers, and before that when the Saxons pushed up from the sea. The eagles of old Rome were, perhaps, borne along it and yet earlier the chariots of the Britons may have used it – traces of all have been found: so that for fifteen centuries this track of primitive peoples has maintained its existence through the strange changes of the times, till now in the season the cumbrous steam ploughing engines jolt and strain and pant over the uneven turf.³⁰

Writing of the hillforts he observes:

They form a chain of forts on the edge of the downland overlooking the vale. [...] cornfields approach, extending on either hand — barley, already bending under the weight of the awn, swaying with every gentle breath of air, stronger oats and wheat, broad squares of swede and turnip and dark-green mangold. [...] Mile after mile, and still no sign of human life — everywhere silence, solitude. Hill after hill and plain after plain. Presently the turf is succeeded by a hard road — flints ground down into dust by broad wagon-wheels bearing huge towering loads of wool or heavy wheat. Just here the old track happens to answer the purposes of modern civilization.³¹

This track, which has endured the ‘strange changes of the times’, is not only a route to travel on foot, but also a metaphysical route which encourages the thinker to consider the prehistoric significance of the landscape, and the implications of this for the modern mind. Jefferies refers to the ‘great earthwork’, which is Liddington Castle, the spot where he would go to think, and one of the places where he began composing his spiritual autobiography, *The Story of My Heart*. Surrounding the earthwork is an archaeological landscape which has grown into and around the natural world; akin to Hardy’s barrows ‘almost crystallised to natural products by time’ in *The Return of the Native*.³² The ‘chain of forts’, which are ‘all connected by the same green track’ denotes the uniformity of prehistoric organisation, and contrasts with the ground that ‘sinks’, and the ‘bending’ and ‘swaying’ crops. Beside the track, which conceals hares in the long grass at its edges, steam engines appear as incongruous animals which ‘jolt and strain and pant over the uneven turf’, representing a new form of labour which has diverted away from the course of prehistoric

³⁰ Richard Jefferies, *Wild Life in a Southern County* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 53.

³¹ *Wild Life in a Southern County*, pp. 53–4.

³² Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native* (New York: Signet Classic, 1959), p. 14.

tradition. In 'Unequal Agriculture' Jefferies notes the traditional style of Victorian ploughing to be essentially unchanged since prehistoric times. The introduction of steam traction engines, which 'tore up' the ground, threatened this sense of continuity in the way in which people worked and experienced the land. The places where the old track 'happens to answer the purposes of modern civilisation' is a sudden, accidental occurrence; much as, for rural populations in Wiltshire traditional ways of farming continued until they were forcibly eclipsed by modern techniques. As the ancient Ridgeway continued to connect sites which were thousands of years old — despite the unpredictable threats of modern change — the archaeological imagination afforded a stable avenue for the late-Victorian thinker; one that tangibly connected past and contemporary ways of living through the landscape.

For Jefferies, who combined scientific rationalism with a mystical sensitivity, archaeology first began as a practical interest, and later in his career became a method of tracing metaphysical and spiritual connections between humans and the material world through time. After researching the prehistoric archaeology of his local area in the early 1870s Jefferies went on to use archaeological sites in his work as settings where the mind was free to imagine back through time, and into the future. In his notebooks Jefferies records that it was on the Wiltshire Downs, by the burial mound of an ancient warrior, where he began to forge a deeper spiritual relationship with the natural world. In *The Story of My Heart*, published in 1883, he lies on the grass by a tumulus, and through his senses feels closer to the natural world and to the life of the man interred there:

The sun of the summer morning shone on the dome of sward, and the air came softly up from the wheat below, the tips of the grasses swayed as it passed sighing faintly, it ceased, and the bees hummed by to the thyme and heathbells. I became absorbed in the glory of the day, the sunshine, the sweet air, the yellowing corn turning from its sappy green to summer's noon of gold, the lark's song like a waterfall in the sky. I felt at that moment that I was like the spirit of the man whose body was interred in the tumulus; I could understand and feel his existence the same as my own. [...] Resting by the tumulus, the spirit of the man who had been interred there was to me really alive, and very close. This was quite natural, as natural and simple as the grass waving in the wind, the bees humming, and the larks' songs.³³

In this passage the spirit of the prehistoric ancestor is as alive to the

³³ Richard Jefferies, *The Story of My Heart*, ed. by Thomas B. Mosher (Portland: ME, 1905), pp. 28–9.

author as the natural landscape which surrounds him. Although physically separated by death, the conceptual distinction between Jefferies and the warrior is bridged through their inhabiting the same landscape. The identity of the interred man — what Jefferies conceives of as ‘the abstract personality of the dead’ — is known to him through the swaying grasses which grow on the same soil as thousands of years before, the warmth of the same sun, and the singing of the same generations of larks, all of which transcend ordinary time to connect the living with the dead. That Jefferies feels ‘the same’ as the warrior, suggests an ever-present continuum of humanity — one that supersedes death and connects all human life, both in the past and present. The intangibility of this idea — what might only be a feeling to others — Jefferies attempts to put into words, and, more importantly, the presence of the archaeological past facilitates this process.

Essentially a compilation of thoughts, feelings and speculations derived from his experiences in different landscapes, the book uses archaeological and geographical features of environments which Jefferies knew in order to think about and foster encounter with the unknown territories of the mind. The key settings of the book, although unnamed in the text, include the Sussex coast, London, and the Wiltshire landscapes near Coate Farm. In his drafts for the book, Jefferies notes that he had wished to express his esoteric feelings for at least fifteen years, since 1867.³⁴ He writes that he had spent much of this time searching for the right format for the book, unable to decide whether it should be ‘metre [...] as most appropriate to the chant of the earth, or whether in the abstract shape of immaterial prayer.’³⁵ In a draft dated 1882 Jefferies roughly lists the various places where he had felt compelled to begin writing the book, which include the River Churn in Cirencester,³⁶ a spot in the gardens of Coate Farm where he could watch the sun rising over Liddington Hill, and Pevensey Castle in Sussex, one of the largest and best surviving examples of Roman fortifications in the UK. Jefferies regularly walked

³⁴ See the opening line, ‘The story of my heart commences seventeen years ago’ (*The Story of My Heart*, p. 3).

³⁵ ‘The Genesis of the Story of My Heart’, *Field and Farm*, ed. by Samuel Looker (London: Phoenix House, 1957), p. 167.

³⁶ With the assistance of Simon Coleman it has been possible to identify the spot by the River Churn that Jefferies refers to. In the ‘Genesis’ he refers to ‘most distasteful labour’ from which he took a half hour break to stand beside a brook leading to the Churn, which flowed past a Roman wall. We have identified this experience as having taken place in Cirencester when Jefferies was working for the *Wilts and Glos Standard*. The ‘distasteful labour’ might refer to his reporting of legal cases in the Chamber of Agriculture in 1873, or could even refer to an earlier period of work for the WGS in 1869 when he was researching ‘A History of Cirencester’.

to Liddington to seek time and space away from hamlet life at Coate, and it became one of his favourite thinking places. The protective enclosure of the hill fort, with its ramparts and fosses, afforded him shelter from observation and allowed him to relax and think. In the draft of the *Story* he writes that at the farm he would often feel 'despised' or 'ashamed' if one of the locals were to observe him contemplating the scenery; whereas he records that on the summit of Liddington he felt 'quite shut in and concealed and utterly alone'.³⁷ From his position on the top of Liddington, surveying the plains below, Jefferies perceives that geographical distance, and its archaeo-historical depth, reflect the immense unknown potential of the mind itself. What he terms the 'crude' and 'coarse' fosse has a direct effect upon his resolution to write; like the prehistoric builders he feels that he 'had to begin somewhere', no matter how 'rude' and 'roughly hewn' his creation.³⁸ As the prehistoric builders constructed unique and symbolic monuments as testament to their beliefs, so Jefferies perceived himself to be constructing what he described to be 'a new book of the soul [...] a book drawn from the present and future, not the past.'³⁹

To be continued

Bibliography

'Discovery of Roman Remains in Wiltshire', *The Relinquary: quarterly archaeological journal and review*, April 1884, p. 256

'*The Antiquary*', *Saturday Review* 53 (1882), pp. 772–4

Chandler, John, 'An Uncomfortable Antiquary: Richard Jefferies and Victorian Local History', *The Richard Jefferies Society Journal* 5 (1996), pp. 14–24

Crawford, Oswald, 'Richard Jefferies: Field-Naturalist and Litterateur', *The Idler; an illustrated monthly magazine*, October 1898, pp. 289–301

Dyer, James, *Discovering Archaeology in England and Wales* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2008)

Hardy, Thomas, *The Return of the Native* (New York: Signet Classic, 1959)

Jefferies, Richard, *Wild Life in a Southern County* (CUP 2011)

Jefferies, Richard, *Letters to Aunt Ellen* (Oxon: Petton Books, 2011)

Jefferies, Richard, 'The Commonest Thing in the World', *Landscape and Labour*, ed. John Pearson (Bradford-on-Avon: Moonraker Press, 1979)

Jefferies, Richard, *Field and Farm*, ed. by Samuel Looker (London: Phoenix House, 1957)

Jefferies, Richard, *The Notebooks of Richard Jefferies*, ed. by Samuel J. Looker (London: Grey

³⁷ *The Story of My Heart*, p. 142.

³⁸ 'Draft', *The Story of My Heart*, ed. by Samuel J. Looker (London: Constable, 1947), p. 144.

³⁹ *The Story of My Heart*, p. 26.

Walls Press, 1948)

Jefferies, Richard, *The Story of My Heart*, ed. by Samuel J. Looker (London: Constable, 1947)

Jefferies, Richard, *The Story of My Heart*, ed. by Thomas B. Mosher (Portland: ME, 1905)

Jefferies, Richard, *Jefferies' Land*, ed. by Grace Toplis (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent, 1896)

Jefferies, Richard, *Greene Ferne Farm* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1880)

Jefferies, Richard, 'The Monkbourn Mystery', *New Monthly Magazine*, January 1876, pp. 1–14

Matthews, Hugoe and Treitel, Phyllis, *The Forward Life of Richard Jefferies* (Oxon: Petton Books, 1994)

M.F.H., 'Gone Away', *Baily's Monthly Magazine of Sports and Pastimes*, 1 March 1867, p. 31

Morris, Brian, *Richard Jefferies and the Ecological Vision* (Victoria, BC: Trafford, 2006)

Parsons, Julien, *British Archaeological Magazine*, February 2002 [online]

Stokes, George T., 'Recent Discoveries and the Christian Faith', *The Sunday at Home: a family magazine for Sabbath reading*, 25 May 1889, pp. 325–328

Smith, Cecil, 'Recent Archaeological Research', *Archaeological Review*, July 1889, pp. 297–315

The Royal Society of Antiquaries Manuscript Library.

Wilson, Daniel, *The Archaeology and Prehistoric Annals of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Sutherland and Knox, 1851)

ISSN 0968-4247

Published by the Richard Jefferies Society, January 2013

Printed by Cats Solutions