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The Coming Woman

*Reprinted for the first time from World 28 June 1876. Unsigned;
attributed by John Pearson*

The Cavalier poet, wistfully meditating upon
That not impossible she,
Who shall control my heart and me,

sketched out in his fancy an ideal woman, at whose disposal to lay his heart and sword when she should appear in tangible being. This flower-in-the-buttonhole age, idly lounging and trifling, but not wholly heartless, every now and then casts furtive glances forwards, half ashamed of emotion, yet a little anxious, wondering what manner of woman the future will see moving amongst us.

That the hitherto calm waters of womanhood are troubled is obvious enough from the mud which comes to the surface. With a divorce court, which sits (appropriately enough, some ill-natured people say) almost every day during the 'season', and which reveals now and then facts as strange and unnatural to English ideas as a certain class of French fiction; with an ever-increasing list of wife-murders and suicide succeeding murder (hardly a day goes by without the papers recording a tragedy of this kind, and the details too often suggest suspected infidelity as the cause); with a public appetite for vicious scandal of the most glaring sort, an appetite which grows with what it feeds upon, and which is sedulously titillated by interested publications; -with these phenomena staring him in the face, the cynic has fair excuse for his prophecy, that the long worshipped and supreme idol, Woman, is tottering to the fall; for its feet are but of clay. He can add, that as the supply is always equal to the demand, so while this taste reigns there will never be wanting foolish virgins to be paraded - not *en chemise*, with lighted taper and bare feet, but in silk and scarlet and fine linen; not for abhorrence but for admiration.

The tight-fitting skirt of the day forbids the construction of a bicycle upon which girls could ride; but, with the sole exception of the bicycle, what masculine pursuit is there in which they do not join? It is whispered that taper fingers cling tightly to the slender champagne-glass, and cruel tale-bearers inform us that there is hardly one woman in ten who escapes the imputation of secret drinking; an abominable lie, doubtless, in the majority of cases, but a lie that would not 'give tongue' so loudly if the scent were not hot in places. To let that pass as so foul a blot as to be beyond belief - a fire will sometimes smother itself in its own black smoke - there is yet another charge in the brief of the devil's advocate. Time was when here and there a lady would timidly and blushing - as if it were just a little spice of naughtiness only - take a bet upon a favourite race-horse in kid-gloves merely. Such an innocent 'plunge' lent a zest and added a laugh to the lunch on the top of the drag. Where is the man now who has not experienced the cunning and diplomatic pumping of some irresistible creature,

worming from him secrets of the stable and of the trials on the breezy down, and who has not been over-persuaded by the sweetest of pouting lips just to lay five to two when the list said 'evens', in order that the temptress might make her book square? They have a terrible advantage, these elegant gamblers, over weak males. Some men scarcely stir from their clubs, and carefully avoid a possible *tete a tete* with a lady during the week preceding the great races. Novels of the past - ten years since - and scandalous chronicles of those days record how fashionable matrons pledged family jewels, and supplied their place with paste, in order to meet extravagant milliners' bills, contracted without the knowledge of their husbands. In our time whispers have gone round that jewels and plate have been pledged secretly that fair gamblers may meet their debts of honour; imaginary thieves called in to cover the loss, and rewards safely offered in the agony columns of the newspapers to divert suspicion. To speak in downright English, there is a widespread belief that gambling is extremely prevalent among the sex. Nor is the mania confined to those who are sneeringly denominated 'fast' by their compeers. When a middle-aged well-to-do matron exultingly exclaims that a rise of three shillings per ton in the price of coals means a thousand pounds in her pocket, what are we to suppose except that she has speculated for the rise in colliery shares? A keen observer, writing of the United States not long since, said that the very servant-girls invested their dollars in shares, and it was with their money that half the financial schemes of New York were floated. If London stockbrokers were to open their mouths society would stand aghast at the amount of feminine speculation. They are good judges, as a rule, of the turn events are about to take. Women have always been credited with an instinctive insight; and ancient nations consulted them before inarching into battle. But they are too bold; they go too far; they do not understand the *art of leaving off*, which is one of the great secrets of success.

A public advertisement in the *Times* recently, calling together a meeting to consider a certain nauseous Act relating to the 'social evil', prominently announced that both sexes could attend. To pry with prurient curiosity into the miserable secrets of Mary Magdalene, placarded almost as a fashionable amusement side by side with morning concerts, and Maskelyne & Cooke! All Juvenal wrote cannot compare with this plain unadorned fact.

Woman riding to hounds, her husband or her brother in the field, and *gentlemen* only her companions, is a natural and charming sight. Can we say as much for woman on prize horses at the Agricultural Hall, charging five-barred gates and artificial ponds of water, with a huge crowd looking on applauding and 'making remarks' - that most hateful of all things - and newspaper reporters writing descriptive accounts afterwards of her style of figure?

An ancient tavern-sign, rudely representing a woman without a head, was called The Good or *Silent* Woman, being a coarse embodiment and visible image of the great poet's sentiment, 'Her voice was soft and low' - an excellent thing in woman.

There are ladies at this hour perambulating fashionable London pavements whose sole object in their conversation with each other appears to be that every passer-by shall over-hear them. To talk at the top of the voice and to stare strangers out of

countenance are, however, minor matters, when the former things are considered. Lady orators, woman doctors, voters, representatives, all these have been dinned into our ears till they are deaf with the noise. Not that there is much danger in this. From the nursery days downwards it is an accepted truism that while there is a goodly uproar the children are not up to much mischief. When they are silent there arises a suspicion of something going wrong. If the noise were all!

But there are signs that a miasmatic poison is insidiously creeping into society under the fairest guise of fine words and phrases, silently spreading itself abroad, whispering into delicate ears of greater liberty and freedom, of self-reliance, and a semi-heroic disregard of ancient trammels fettering the social intercourse of the sexes. People pass to and fro now from the very ends of the earth, safe, untouched by robber or murderer. By a species of mutual consent the world has agreed to forego its evil passions of this kind. The necessity to carry arms has ceased. You may dwell next door to your greatest enemy, and feel no anxiety as to your life or property. Why then should not this condition of things be carried out to its logical conclusion - why should not woman travel hither and thither, and penetrate alone into all places, it being understood by mutual consent that the fair jewel of her reputation shall remain unsullied? The danger is purely artificial, so runs the argument; it is a sophism kept up by iteration only. There may be friendships formed and visits paid, even by married women, alone and at all hours, to persons of the other sex, without any evil. In fact civilisation obliterates sex. The character of man and of woman has so strengthened with the passing ages that the animal is practically extinct; the soul and the mind are dominant. In mediaeval times it really was impossible for a beautiful woman to stir from the castle-wall without guards, because of the danger of outrage and foul wrong. It is not so now. These superstitions of chaperon - of the presence of husband, brother, *third* party - are merely lingering relics of a barbarous past, and as absurd as chain-armour in Fleet-street. It is agreed that the jealous walls of the Turkish harem actually create the desire of the very intrigues they are intended to frustrate. These invisible but potent walls of custom form a social seraglio from which indignant hearts long to escape. Throw down the wall, and at once all the mystery disappears. Woman walks abroad in all her native majesty, and the moment she is free the idea of a taint never occurs to any one. This creed is faithfully believed in many quarters where least expected. It sounds well. The only question is whether the world is quite educated up to the point at which it can be put into practice safely. Certain acts which have happened seem to say no. But then the pioneers of every great movement are sure to be made martyrs, which phrase also sounds well. Out of the seething bubbling furnace of the great Civil War there finally emerged a noble and true freedom, a constitutional strength, a unity envied by all nations. It really may be that these crude ideas of woman's rights, these false starts and miserable fiascoes, do represent a genuine movement, just as the grinding and splintering of the edge of a field of ice against the Polar shores gives warning that the ice is in motion. We do not see the progress made by the earnest at heart, who are quiet, and work without sound of trumpet. The ships

that sail on safely to their haven are unnoticed. It is the wrecks that are noised abroad, and are in every man's mouth.

Out of this veritable witches' cauldron, where much that is beautiful and true is jumbled up and stirred about with grotesque and detestable ingredients, there may yet emerge a perfect woman. The destiny of the world in times past was guided by the rude hands of men; the destiny of the future depends greatly upon women. Meanwhile, shutting our eyes to the mischief of the hour, we retain our faith strong and pure, and, wistfully meditating, look hopefully forward to the advent of 'that not impossible she'.

Richard Jefferies and the Nature Tradition

Brian Morris

This essay explores the place of Richard Jefferies in the 'back-to-nature' movement of the late nineteenth century and, comparing Jefferies with the two other important romantic naturalists, Henry David Thoreau and W H Hudson, emphasizes that although Jefferies was certainly a poetic and visionary naturalist he was also a pioneer ecologist.

1. The Back-to-Nature Impulse

Towards the latter part of the nineteenth century in Britain there arose a number of cultural movements, both political and literary, that expressed a fundamental critique of urban-industrial society. These movements have been described as expressing a 'back-to-the-land' or 'back-to-nature' impulse, which probably has its origins in the social unrest of the 1840s when the Chartists railed against the evils of industrialism and advocated the restitution of the land to the people through co-operative colonies or allotment schemes (Gould 1988:6-7).

The movements that expressed this 'back-to-nature' ethos were all reacting to the fundamental changes that had occurred in Britain since the end of the eighteenth century: the development of industrial capitalism which entailed the transformation of an economy based on agriculture to one based on industry and commerce; the enclosures and the increasing commodification of land and labour; the development of industrial production through the creation of iron foundries, cotton mills, coal mines, gas works, and the advent of the railways in the 1840s; and finally, increasing urbanization as people were driven from the land. Between 1801 and 1911 the proportion of the population living in urban areas, writes Jan Marsh, rose from 20 per cent to 80 per cent, and this gave rise to enormous problems of squalor, ill-health and poverty within urban areas (1982:2).

An emphasis on social reform and a critique of industrial capitalism thus developed during the nineteenth century, and this critique was particularly manifested in the socialist movement. But within this movement, or closely related to it, there emerged a cultural tendency that advocated a return to 'nature'. This 'back-to-nature' movement proposed a radical alternative to urban-industrial society, and entailed the following, as Marsh put it: 'the city must go, industry must be dismantled, the people must be resettled in villages, and the economy returned to the craft workshops and guilds' (1982:3). The 'back-to-nature' ethos, according to Peter Gould, advocated the following notions: 'the simple life, an alternative to life in the city and work in industry, living in harmony with and as part of nature, the liberalization of sexual and social relations, and a more sensitive approach to animals. Back-to-the-land denotes

dissatisfaction with urban-industrial society, and sympathy for things rural and the natural' (1988:ix).

The notion of a return to nature was strengthened by the agricultural crisis of the 1880s. The causes and the impact of the agricultural depression are complex, but it led to a drastic decline in the rural population, the undermining of village communities, and the conversion of large tracts of land into game reserves, as landowners sought alternative forms of profit -the pheasant ousting the peasant as the saying went (Marsh, 1982:4).

With the economic decline of the countryside, and the rise of industrial capitalism, the 'back-to-nature' or 'pastoral' impulse began to express itself in diverse ways. First, there was a feeling that science expressed a highly mechanistic Cartesian approach to nature, and was thus supportive of exploitive relationships, whether between humans, or humans and nature. Intuition and poetic insight were needed. Secondly, as the city and industrial civilization came to be seen as physically and morally corrupt, there developed a nostalgia for rural life, and a belief that a return to the natural life was an essential remedy for the afflictions that beset urban people. Health and human happiness were thus to be found by restoring people's close contact with nature, by re-establishing the unity between people and the land. Rural life and agricultural occupations, specifically craft industries, came to be extolled and the 'lost values' of the English yeoman were re-affirmed. Thirdly, increasing dissatisfaction with orthodox Christianity, particularly with the established church, and the growing influence of Darwinian thought, led to the development of what has been described as 'the worship of nature'. Nature came to be seen as the supreme value - the source of all goodness and a veritable substitute for the deity - 'a mystical deity without the archaic mythology' (Marsh 1982:4-5, Gould 1988:17-25).

In essence, then, nature became the symbol of a radical opposition movement to industrial capitalism, and a simple life lived in harmony with nature was taken to be the ideal form of social existence. An uneasy relationship always existed between socialism, particularly Marxism, and this 'back-to-nature' movement. The suggestion that the 'back-to-the-land' movement was 'radical without being revolutionary' (Marsh 1982:5) is, however, somewhat misleading, for both William Morris and Edward Carpenter, the most important figures in the 'back-to-nature' movement, were revolutionary socialists, who attempted to combine radical anti-capitalism with an ecological sensibility. Tolstoy and Kropotkin, also discussed by Marsh in relation to agrarian communes, were also revolutionary anarchists, who expressed a critique of both industrial capitalism and the bureaucratic state, and advocated self-sufficient rural communes that combined agriculture with limited industrial technology.

Three figures were important in influencing and shaping this 'back-to-nature' movement, namely, the art critic John Ruskin, who came to offer a vision of an alternative society based on rural values; the socialist, designer and 'poet of Arcadia', William Morris; and the libertarian socialist Edward Carpenter, who was the poet and prophet of the 'simple life'.

The 'back-to-nature' movement in Britain, as a basic 'anti-industrial impulse' was manifested in many different forms. These are lucidly described by Marsh in her study, although she emphasizes that this Victorian movement was loose and flexible, with little in the way of formal leaders or gurus, and had no clearly articulated ideology. Among its manifestations were the following: the popularity of literature that expressed this cult of the countryside, especially the novels of Thomas Hardy; the setting up of agrarian communes; a revival of rural handicrafts, and an interest in folk traditions and folk song; the advocacy of the 'simple life' expressed in the wearing of sandals and vegetarianism; and finally, the growing popularity of cycling, walking and camping (1982:7).

A similar 'back-to-nature' movement occurred in the United States with the emergence, towards the end of the nineteenth century, of the 'Arcadian Myth'. This was expressed by the creation of national parks, the introduction of nature study into school curricula, the emergence of outdoor youth movements such as Ernest Thompson Seton's 'Woodcraft Indians', and the development of the nature essay and the wilderness novel as literary forms, as reflected in the writings of Seton, John Burroughs, John Muir and Jack London (Schmitt 1969).

One may well ask: where does Richard Jefferies fit into this 'back-to-nature' movement in which both Marsh and Gould see Jefferies as a key figure? Towards the end of the century there arose an insistent demand for 'country books', particularly on the part of an urban readership, and Marsh suggests that this type of writing - which focused on natural history and country lore - 'may be said to have begun with Richard Jefferies' (1982:33). For Jefferies' early writings, especially *The Gamekeeper at Home* (1878), *Wild Life in a Southern County* (1879), and *The Amateur Poacher* (1879), were very popular among urban readers. Marsh quotes the final paragraphs from *The Amateur Poacher*, where Jefferies emphasizes the need to be 'out of doors', as illustrative of this tendency. Although most of the major nineteenth-century poets - Tennyson, Meredith, Swinburne - may be described as 'nature worshippers' Marsh writes: 'It was Richard Jefferies who above all filled the role of nature-priest for a generation of readers who regarded themselves as his disciples' (1982:35). When Jefferies came to publish his autobiography *The Story of My Heart* (1883), it became, Marsh suggests, 'a key text of the age' (1982:36).

In his study *Early Green Politics* (1998) Peter Gould, likewise, emphasizes that Jefferies was an influential figure in the 'back-to-nature' movement. Jefferies' futuristic novel *After London* (1885) influenced William Morris, and his nature writing made a deep impact on the politics of Robert Blatchford and Henry Salt, both of whom were formative influences within the 'back-to-nature' movement. A popular journalist and socialist, Blatchford was the author of *Merrie England* (1893) which sold over a million copies, the book's aim being essentially to convert its readers to the 'simple life' in harmony with nature. In the socialist newspaper *The Clarion* Blatchford recommended Jefferies' nature writings - especially Jefferies' views on the 'desirability and practicality of a return to the simple life' (1988:40). Also important was Jefferies'

attempt, like Hardy's, to gain respect for the skills and knowledge of country people such as the gamekeeper (1988:70).

Yet although Jefferies, like William Morris, combined a critique of industrial capitalism and the squalors of urban living with an ecological sensibility, he never repudiated 'civilization' or city life - any more than did Kropotkin or Morris. They attempted a reconciliation, some kind of integration, between humans and nature, or between the city/town and the country. Jefferies never advocated a return to the past - whether one envisages a medieval society or a form of agrarian capitalism. And evidence from his autobiography also suggests that Jefferies was no Tory radical like Ruskin. Nor did Jefferies, any more than Kropotkin and Carpenter, repudiate reason and science. The idea that his autobiography was penned by a 'genius of fine lunacy untempered by the reasoning powers of a wholly balanced mind' (Scrivener 1949:22) seems an extremely misleading assessment. Jefferies' nature mysticism was an expression of neither insanity nor irrationalism. Jefferies combined a mystical intuition of life within nature with an ecological sensibility that recognised the inter-dependence of all living beings, including humans, and their dependence upon the natural world.

Gould rightly suggests that Jefferies spoke for other contemporaries - Salt, Kropotkin, Morris, Carpenter - when he wrote that his sympathies and hopes were with 'the light of the future, only I should like it to come from nature. The clock should be read by the sunshine, not the sun timed by the clock'. Jefferies never wished to return to the 'past' even if that was possible (RGEixvi, Gould 1988:159).

2. The Rural Tradition in English Literature.

Although the 'back-to-nature' movement is associated with the last two decades of the nineteenth century, scholars have long recognised that Jefferies belongs to a literary tradition that owes its origin to the writings of Gilbert White in the eighteenth. This literary tradition has been variously described as the 'out-of-door essay' (Haymaker 1954), or, more usefully, as the 'rural tradition' (Keith 1975), or with regard specifically to the English novel as the 'naturalist movement' (Ebbatson 1980, Alcorn 1977).

It is beyond the scope of the present essay to discuss these various literary movements or traditions in detail; instead I shall focus specifically on two important writers on rural life and natural history who in some way relate to Jefferies' own work: Henry David Thoreau and W H Hudson. But it must be noted at the outset that the essays and books that constitute the 'rural tradition' - by such writers as George Borrow, John Burroughs, W H Hudson, Mary Russell Mitford and Ernest Thompson Seton for example - were almost exclusively written for an urban readership. As Keith points out, there is a paradox here; for with the decline of the English countryside during the nineteenth century, and increasing urbanization, so there also arose the 'great age of nature writing' (1975:10). Thus, although Jefferies yearned for the country life and nature, and expressed an ecological sensibility, he was forced, like Hudson, to live near London for the sake of his writings (1975:11).

Described by Henry Salt as the first and foremost of the 'poet naturalists', Henry David Thoreau (1817-62) has often been compared with Jefferies and, like Jefferies, died of tuberculosis. A radical individualist, and perceptive observer of nature, and, like Jefferies, a pioneer ecologist, Thoreau spent most of his life in his home town of Concord, Massachusetts, and was a close friend and neighbour of the philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson. He wrote few books, but between 1845 and 1847 lived alone in the woods near Walden pond, and the record of his thoughts and experiences during these two years were published as *Walden, or Life in the Woods* (1854), a book now recognized as a classic in romantic ecology. In many ways Thoreau's personality and background contrast with those of Jefferies: Thoreau never married; he had, like White, a university education, graduating from Harvard at the age of 20, and worked for much of his life as a tutor, and he was actively involved in politics, identifying with the abolitionists in their fight against slavery. His essay 'On the Duty of Civil Disobedience' (1849) had a profound impact on both Henry Salt and Mohandas K Gandhi. But in their essential nature philosophies Thoreau and Jefferies had much in common, for both were critical of mechanistic science and the values and institutions of an expanding industrial capitalism: both distanced themselves from orthodox Christianity, and delighted in the sensuous vitality of the body - although unlike Jefferies, Thoreau seemed unable to appreciate women; and both affirmed the independent reality and plenitude of nature, while at the same time emphasizing its therapeutic and redemptive value. As Thoreau wrote: 'In society you will not find health, but in nature, there is no scent in it so wholesome as the pines, nor any fragrance so penetrating and restorative as the life-everlasting in high pastures. I would keep some book of natural history always beside me as a sort of elixir' (Bode 1947:33, Worster 1977:58, Marshall 1992:186).

The historian of ecology Donald Worster suggests that in his attachment to a specific home locality Thoreau took Gilbert White as his model, keeping a copy of White's *Selborne* on his bookshelf and often referring to it in his journals. (1977:62). What Jefferies and Thoreau, along with White, essentially had in common was, of course, their poetic and ecological approach to the natural world. All three men were 'poet naturalists', devoted to observing and chronicling the fauna and flora - and for Jefferies the wider political and rural economy - of specific locations - Selborne, Concord, and for Jefferies various localities in Southern England, especially in the neighbourhood of Coate. They attempted, as Salt put it, 'to combine the power of minute and patient observation with the exercise of a highly idealistic and imaginative faculty' (1930:98). They were more empirical observers than scientific biologists, and thus offered a rather literary treatment of natural history. Salt described Thoreau, like Jefferies, as a poet naturalist who saw 'nature through the medium of human aspirations' (1930:101). Thoreau is often described as a romantic 'primitivist', and, like Jefferies, he certainly repudiated many aspects of industrial capitalism and urban civilization: as he wrote: 'Most of the luxuries and many of the so-called comforts of life, are not only not indispensable, but positive hindrances, to the elevation of mankind' (Bode 1947:269). Again, like Jefferies, although Thoreau lamented the

alienation of people from nature within an industrial economy, he never advocated a return to earlier forms of society, not did he turn his back on all the gains of western civilization. As Marshall put it: Thoreau 'wanted the best in nature and culture for himself and his fellow citizens' (1992:187) - as indeed did Jefferies.

But Jefferies was much more of a rationalist and visionary than Thoreau, for the latter writer was strongly influenced by the transcendentalist movement associated with Emerson. Transcendentalism was essentially a neo-platonic or idealist philosophy that placed little value on nature in and for itself, but rather celebrated nature as the embodiment of a world spirit or soul. Even though Thoreau took transcendentalism in a much more naturalistic direction than Emerson - whose famous essay on 'Nature' (1836) had a vital impact on his contemporaries - he was nevertheless much more of a religious thinker than Jefferies, who denied any deity in nature.

Emphasizing the similarities between Thoreau and Jefferies with regard to their distinctive way of observing nature - going beyond mere looking - S J Looker nevertheless noted that Thoreau, given his transcendentalism, allowed his philosophical and religious convictions to intrude much more into his nature descriptions than did Jefferies (1965:224). Equally important, although both men extolled the importance of learning from nature, Jefferies never advocated contracting out of urban civilization, still less living as a recluse in a 'pristine' wilderness: for Jefferies, learning from nature implied learning how to live 'together more generously and abundantly' (Drew 1967:199). As a pioneer or arcadian naturalist, Thoreau, like Jefferies, was a pioneer ecologist, in emphasizing the importance of detailed empirical observation and in affirming the intrinsic interdependence of all natural phenomena. (For useful studies of Thoreau, see Salt 1896, Worster 1977: 59-76).

Described by an early biographer and friend, Morley Roberts, as something of a 'mystery', W H Hudson (1841-1922) is renowned as a modern prophet of nature. Coming after Burroughs and Jefferies, he is, perhaps, the most famous of all the nature-essayists. Yet it is well to remember that Hudson was seven years old when Jefferies was born and survived Jefferies by 34 years. Richard Haymaker makes the interesting observation that if Hudson had died at the age of Thoreau, then his only claim to fame would be as the author of a rather 'slight' novel, *The Purple Land*. (Roberts 1924:17, Haymaker 1954:86).

Born in Argentina, on a ranch some eleven miles west of Buenos Aires, Hudson graphically described his early life on the pampas in his eloquent autobiography *Far Away and Long Ago* (1918). His early writings, though, were quite scientific, for in his late twenties Hudson sent many specimens of mammals and birds to the secretary of the London Zoological Society, Philip Sclater, and his letters and notes were published in the Proceedings of the Society. In 1874, when he was 33, Hudson left South America for England -never to return. His motives for doing so have never been clear to his biographers, but it was probably to launch himself on a literary career. His first book, described by his biographer as an 'extraordinary' portrait of a wild and exotic country, was *The Purple Land That England Lost* (1885). After initial difficulties Hudson went on to establish himself as a literary naturalist of distinction, and in the

latter part of his life his writings came to enjoy a considerable vogue among the urban literati. Among his better known books are the following: *Idle Days in Patagonia* (1893), *Birds in a Village* (1893), *Nature in Downland* (1900), *Hampshire Days* (1903), and his most memorable study, *A Shepherd's Life* (1910), as well as a popular work of fiction, *Green Mansions* (1904). At the end of his life, when aged over 80, Hudson published a book of philosophical meditations entitled *A Hind in Richmond Park* (1922). He was a powerful influence for bird protection, and wrote many pamphlets on behalf of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds at the end of the nineteenth century (Haymaker 1954:99).

As a nature essayist Hudson owed little to his predecessors. As Haymaker writes: 'He did not owe his appreciation of the wild and his aloofness to Thoreau, his charm to Burroughs, nor his passionate desire for oneness with the beauty of nature to Jefferies. He was essentially an original genius, obeying merely the laws of his own being' (1954:97). Much has been written on Hudson's philosophy of nature, and he has been interpreted as the person who 'made us conscious of nature', and as providing us with a 'vision of the earth' (Hamilton 1946:ix). Hudson was certainly not unique in this: the same could be said of many other literary naturalists, including Burroughs, Seton and Fabre, as well as Jefferies.

Hudson described himself as a 'religious atheist' (1925:153) and his approach to nature has been called 'intuitive naturism'. Like Jefferies and Burroughs, he abandoned orthodox Christianity, and sought a more affirmative, if not a visionary, approach to nature. He was highly critical of Jefferies' own visionary experiences, as expressed in *The Story of My Heart*, describing them as a 'strain of intense unnatural feeling' (1900:14). Yet, as many scholars have stated, Hudson himself, in his own autobiography *Far Away and Long Ago* described many similar ecstatic experiences.

Hudson referred to these feelings as animism, not in the anthropological sense of an inspired world - the theory of souls within nature - but rather as a kind of faculty or instinct which seemed to Hudson essentially religious. He suggested that there was a sense of 'mystery' or of the 'supernatural' in natural things (1918:224-235). Haymaker suggests that these animistic feelings later broadened into a 'pan-psychic' philosophy, in which familiar things in the environment took on an air of mystery, and were seen as pervaded by a mysterious 'life-force', and that this gave Hudson the power to 'apprehend nature mystically as well as sensuously' (1954:22). This seems hardly different from Jefferies' visionary naturalism, but what it specifically meant to Hudson was a sense of the beauty of the earth, and of an aesthetic order within the universe. Thus Hudson's approach to nature has often been described as one of 'aesthetic intuition' (Hamilton 1946:3; Haymaker 1954:354).

In ways similar to Jefferies - as well as to the poets Coleridge and Baudelaire - Hudson had an extraordinary awareness of the senses and of the exquisiteness of perception. He often translated, again like Jefferies, the effects of one sense into another - the singing of finches being likened, for example, to the sight of flowing water. Although Jefferies had a delicately attuned ear to a wide range of sound, particularly in relation to bird song or the sound of the wind, Hudson, Haymaker

avers, had an even wider range, and he describes Hudson's aural memory as phenomenal (1954:144-6).

The poet, it has been said, comes closest to the actual experiences of nature in his descriptions of it, for the poet approaches nature through his or her perceptions, whereas the scientist, striving to be impersonal and depending largely on conceptual thought, tends to distance himself from nature (Haymaker 1954:150). Hudson, like Jefferies, was thus always hesitant, if not critical, of the purely scientific approach to nature, as it tended to ignore the aesthetic quality of our experiences of the world, and to bypass the 'inner meaning' or 'sense of mystery' that goes with this experience. Haymaker thus concludes that Hudson was neither a pure poet nor a pure scientist, but rather, like Thoreau, Burroughs and Jefferies, a 'poet naturalist' - 'a poet by temperament, possessing wings, and a naturalist of long habit providing ballast'(1954:150).

W J Keith likewise emphasizes that Hudson tended to occupy - again like Jefferies - a place between that of the scientific naturalist and that of the poet - for the ideal naturalist is never merely passive, never just an observer, but brings to the experience an aesthetic or visionary perspective. Hudson himself expressed this succinctly when he wrote - and put in italics - '*what we see we /ee!*'(1900:24).

Hudson wrote in an engaging and simple style, and indeed, Conrad once remarked that Hudson wrote as the grass grows. But three aspects of his writing are worth noting. One is that all his nature essays give a sense that Hudson is simply a wanderer, a nomad, and in fact in *Hampshire Days* he describes himself as simply 'a rambler about the country who seldom stays many days in one village or spot' (1903:238). The majority of Hudson's English country books could well have been called *Afoot in England* (1909), the title of a book that records Hudson's ramblings around Salisbury plain (Haymaker 1954:155, Keith 1975:175). The second aspect is the sense of 'haunting sadness' and 'profound melancholy' that seems to run through his work, especially his fiction, and has been commented upon by many scholars (Massingham 1923:21, Tomalin 1954:114). Finally, like Jefferies, Hudson was interested in describing not only all aspects of the biotic world, but also concerned himself with human life. 'Everything in nature interests me', Hudson wrote (1925:212), for he felt that a true field naturalist was an observer of everything he saw 'from a man to an ant or a plant' (1922:322).

Yet Hudson is not without his detractors, and in many comparisons that have been made between Hudson and Jefferies, it is the latter naturalist, misleadingly dubbed a pure subjectivist by Haymaker, who tends to be viewed more favourably. In her well-known *Scrutiny* review of Jefferies' writing the critic Q D Leavis remarked that one of the reasons that Jefferies had been neglected after the First World War was the ethos of the 'Bloomsbury Cult' around W H Hudson which propagated the impression 'that Hudson did everything Jefferies did, only much better because he was an artist, a great stylist, and the other a clumsy amateur who wrote journalism'. Leavis held a contrary opinion, finding Hudson a bore, and his sentimentalism rather embarrassing. Even the best of Hudson's country books, *A Shepherd's Life* (1910) she found rather strained,

unconvincing, and 'how literary', compared with the vitality that informed Jefferies' *Round About a Great Estate* (1880) (1938:440).

The ornithologist James Fisher was of a similar opinion. He found Hudson, as the naturalist expressed himself in his essays, to be intensely egocentric, ambitious, anti-intellectual, and completely muddled about evolution. So he could never attain the 'vision of earth' ascribed to him by his more sycophantic biographers. Although a good reporter of the troubled place of nature in an increasingly urbanized world, Hudson, Fisher argued, though he preached back to nature 'never did preach that knowledge is the key to nature'. Fisher found Hudson to be ignorant regarding many facts of natural history, and suggested that Jefferies had a much richer knowledge of bird life, based on his own personal observations, than Hudson. His book *British Birds* Fisher found to be neither accurate nor comprehensive, and to be largely based on secondary sources. Thus although Jefferies may have lacked Hudson's literary skills - as well as his morbidity - he was, like the poet John Clare, much closer to nature. Having been enthused and inspired by Jefferies' writing as a boy, Fisher concluded that he liked 'Jefferies' long, pouring paragraphs of clear and clean-watched ruralities very much indeed. Better these than Hudson's cheerless vision of earth' (1966:199-202).

Making similar observations, Keith suggests that whereas Jefferies is normally 'inside' the subject he is describing, Hudson, in his English nature essays at least, is always an outsider - a 'sensitive and sympathetic stranger' (1965:66). Richard Mabey agrees, emphasizing that Hudson was essentially a tourist and that 'his long-distance ramblings about England echo more with condescension than real curiosity.' Again, he compares Hudson's writing unfavourably with Jefferies' engaging and conversational style in *Round About a Great Estate* (1999:52). The naturalist Brian Vesey-Fitzgerald also considered Jefferies a much more careful and accurate observer of the natural world than Hudson (Warren 1948:14).

3. Jefferies and Ecology

As a literary naturalist Jefferies has often been compared with Gilbert White, for both men attempted to chronicle fully and accurately the life-history of the fauna and flora of the English countryside. But White had a much more taxonomic and scientific bent, and in comparison, Jefferies has quite misleadingly been represented as a mere cataloguer of sights and sounds. From a strictly scientific point of view Jefferies, as one early critic put it, 'was an idler in the land, sensuous, and, therefore, sensitive to nature's choicest colours and sounds and fragrances; passionate and so given to dreams and musings and speculations' (Graham 1897:69). Jefferies was thus essentially a poetic and visionary naturalist; he cannot be conceived either as a zoologist or a botanist, or even as an archaeologist or ornithologist. Yet Jefferies, like Fabre and Seton, was an extremely close observer of the natural world and had an acute ecological sensibility. He therefore focused not on collecting and taxonomy (which was a passion among other naturalists in the nineteenth century) but rather on exploring specific habitats, and on describing the dynamic inter-relationships between the various organisms within an ecosystem, including, of course, humans. Though

clearly influenced by Darwin, and often paying tribute to the famous biologist, Jefferies saw the natural world as essentially having a chaotic form, rather than as reflecting any evolutionary pattern. As he explicitly put it in his autobiography: 'Nothing is evolved. There is no evolution any more than there is any design in nature.'(SH 137).

It was Jefferies' rejection of Darwin's evolutionary theory that particularly troubled that other great and much neglected nineteenth-century naturalist John Lubbock (Lord Avebury), who otherwise held a very high opinion of Jefferies' work. It was Lubbock who unveiled the memorial tablet to Jefferies at 22 Victoria Street, Swindon, in November 1902. Lubbock recognised, though he tried to play it down, that Jefferies rejected Christianity and most of the theological doctrines of his day; what he acknowledged as important, however, in Jefferies' writings was that they were 'full of reverential feelings' and profoundly expressed the 'great mystery of existence' (1903:72). As a naturalist, Lubbock put Jefferies in the same class as Gilbert White, Ruskin and Thoreau, for Jefferies shared the same 'great gifts' as a nature essayist and he noted that 'Jefferies resembled Thoreau in his love of solitary meditation; Ruskin in his love of beauty' (1903:76). But it was the poetic naturalism, as expressed in Jefferies' essay 'The Pageant of Summer' that most appealed to Lubbock, an essay that expresses not only Jefferies' poetic imagination but also his ecological sensibilities.

Yet although Jefferies was a pioneer ecologist, and like many other naturalists - such as Seton, Burroughs, Fabre, G D H Roberts, and Hudson -played a significant part in arousing public interest in wildlife and ecology, he is nevertheless singularly ignored in many histories of ecology. For example, in his important and wide-ranging history of ecological ideas *Nature's Economy* (1977), Donald Worster mentions Jefferies only once (misspelt) and tends to play down the importance of the poetic naturalists of the late nineteenth century, such as Seton, Fabre, Hudson, Muir and Jefferies, although he recognised that these 'virtuosi of the nature essay' were among the best-selling writers of their age (1977:16).

Beginning with the eighteenth century, Worster suggests two major trends within ecology, as it developed as a cultural movement; the 'imperial' tradition associated with Carl Linnaeus, which emphasized the exercise of reason and human dominion over nature, and the 'arcadian' tradition of Gilbert White, which aimed to restore humans to a more peaceful 'coexistence' with other organisms. This tradition is seen by Worster as later exemplified by the romantic movement, and the writings of Thoreau (to whom Worster devotes a long chapter). Its approach to nature was essentially ecological, with an emphasis on holism, relationships and interdependence. This 'arcadian' tradition, Worster suggests, was critical of mechanistic science and industrial capitalism, as well as of orthodox Christianity which tended to have a bias against nature (1977:58). Jefferies is clearly situated within this 'arcadian' tradition of ecology.

But the single most important figure in the development of the 'idea of ecology' according to Worster, was Charles Darwin (1809-82), who emphasized that nature was a 'web of complex relations', and that not only were humans an intrinsic part of

nature, but that nature itself was not so much a mechanism as a historical process. Worster emphasizes the important influence of Humboldt's organic approach, and through it the romantic philosophy of nature, on Darwin's thought (1977:183). Although Darwinian theory was incorporated into the Victorian ethic of domination, with an emphasis on competition, it was Darwin, Worster argues, who was the most important and imposing figure in the development of an alternative, biocentric perspective within ecological thought - an attitude, he suggests, that Darwin snared with Henry Salt, Thomas Hardy and W H Hudson. Darwin, he concluded, 'never faltered in his belief that beyond humanity and its affairs lives a living ecological community that has always been man's ultimate home and kin' (1977:187).

But then Worster more or less skips over the late nineteenth century, and the concluding chapter deals specifically with twentieth-century developments in ecology. This entails the emergence of the 'science' of ecology in the works of Arthur Tansley, Frederick Clements, Charles Elton and Aldo Leopold (for example) and the development of 'organicism' as a philosophical approach - expressed in the writings of Jan Smuts, Alfred North Whitehead and William Morton Wheeler.

Paul Sears (1956) suggested that with the emergence of ecology as a scientific discipline 'natural history' declined, and it is specifically those naturalists who were writing towards the end of the nineteenth century - Burroughs, Fabre, Seton and, of course, Jefferies - who are singularly bypassed by Worster. Those who preached the 'gospel of nature' and attempted to combine science with an aesthetic sensibility, are covered by Worster in barely two pages, with Jefferies getting but a single mention. In a later essay by Worster, Jefferies (still misspelt) is included with Thoreau, William Morris and John Muir as constituting the opposition to industrial capitalism in its early stages (1993:182).

In his interesting and scholarly study of the social history of 'natural history' in Britain, Davis Ellis ton Allen (1976), likewise, tends to marginalise the nineteenth-century poetic naturalists. The focus of the book is almost exclusively on natural-history and scientific societies such as the Linnaean Society of London and the Botanical Society of the British Isles, and on those naturalists with a decidedly scientific or academic bias. But apart from Hudson there is little discussion of the poetic or literary naturalists whose popular nature essays at the turn of the century did much to evoke an ecological consciousness among the general public. Allen notes that Jefferies, after Thoreau, had been one of the first naturalists to develop an intuitive understanding of nature while remaining faithful to scientific actuality, but that while Jefferies triumphed in his quest for a new style of natural history, he was just 'too far ahead of popular taste to be able to profit from his efforts in his lifetime'(1976:228).

Described as an 'exploration in ecological thinking', Peter Marshall's *Nature's Web* (1992) is even more biased against the literary naturalists. Although discussing many religious traditions and academic philosophers who are by no stretch of the imagination 'ecological', Marshall completely ignores the many nineteenth- and early twentieth-century naturalists. In contrast, Anna Bramwell's history of ecology in the twentieth century (1989) highlights the important role that Jefferies played in the

development of ecological thought. She notes that Jefferies has been described as both a Tory transcendentalist writer' (Offer 1981) - which is quite misleading - and as the inspirer of William Morris's Utopian socialism (Meier 1978:68) and suggests that the contradiction is resolved by recognizing that Jefferies was an early ecologist. A gifted journalist, an author who could describe the harsh life of the agricultural labourer without losing his pantheistic love of nature, Jefferies, along with Henry Williamson, is described by Bramwell as a 'literary ecologist' (1989:135).

Interpreting the ecology movement as essentially a 'reaction' to the anomic effects of industrial capitalism, Bramwell tends to emphasize links with right-wing conservatism and fascism, although she notes that an 'ecological world view' is shared by scholars and writers of very different political persuasions. Jefferies, of course, was in most respects closer to the libertarian socialism of William Morris, Kropotkin, Salt and Carpenter than he was to the right-wing politics of his disciple Henry Williamson. But what cannot be doubted is that Richard Jefferies, besides being a poetic and visionary naturalist, was also a pioneer ecologist.*

*First suggested by John Price in a talk to the Richard Jefferies Society, Swindon, March 1988.

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'Nature' in the Works of Richard Jefferies

Chen Ying

Richard Jefferies is always known as one of the great English 'country' writers of the nineteenth century, especially famous for his writings on nature. First I should explain what I mean by the word 'nature'. The word 'nature' will not only indicate many aspects of the natural world and phenomena on earth - the fields, air, birds, flowers, hills, brooks, trees, grass and the change of seasons - but will also cover the realm of the cosmos or universe - stars, sun and moon, winds of heaven. In a word, everything that is not man-made will fall into the category of 'nature'. To use Jefferies' own words, I use "nature" in the widest sense; in [the sense of] the cosmos'.¹

Thus defined, this essay will focus on the following aspects of Jefferies' idea of nature: 1. Man, as a part of nature and humanity, should live in harmony with nature; 2. There is no design, no purpose, no plan in nature, nothing human in nature; nature is anti-human, 'outside' or 'beyond' the human; 3. The beauty of nature is in sharp contrast to the misery of human life; 4. What use man should make of nature is up to man - nature can be the exemplar for an ideal of human life, can be a haven with healing power; but if man makes ill use of it, the result can be disastrous or catastrophic.

1. Man is a part of the whole universe.

In his autobiography Richard Jefferies describes his sense of oneness with the universe: 'I now became lost, and absorbed into the being or existence of the universe. I felt deep down into the earth under... losing thus my separateness of being came to seem like a part of the whole.'- He exclaims that the earth and sun were to him like his flesh and blood.³ In 'The Seasons and the Stars' he expresses even more clearly his sense of being an integral part of the whole universe when he describes his experience of lying down on his back on the grass and gazing up into the sky: 'Looking straight up like this, from the path to the stars, it was clear and evident that I was really riding among them . . . I was in the midst of them . . . They were as much a part of my existence . . . I have never felt so much myself, an individual, as a part of this whole... Thus I realized that. . .the elms, the blue doors and roadway, the cattle-shed, and the stile, with myself, were in the same stream of space.'⁴ Here Jefferies tries to reconcile himself (man) with nature, to achieve harmony.

This sense of cosmic consciousness finds echoes in traditional Chinese thinking, which believes that 'man is an integral part of nature'³ and stresses the harmony and the inseparable relationship between man and nature. Both Confucianism and Taoism maintained this theory, which is stated and restated in classic texts like the following: 'A great man should act in accordance with the law of nature, so as to be as wise as the

sun and the moon, as orderly as the four seasons, and accepting the fate destined by ghosts or gods'. (Zhou Yi) 'Man should adapt himself to nature'. (Lao Zi) 'As heaven and earth and I were born successively, all things on the earth are in harmony with me.' (Zhuang Zi)

The theory that man is an integral part of nature also refers to a very lofty realm of human life, an ultimate truth and ideal state. People with this view in their world outlook tend to harmonize the relation between man and nature, thus achieving peace of mind and improving physical and mental health.⁶ In Jefferies, this view is reflected in his autobiography. In *The Story of My Heart*, he expressed his view of the universe more than once and he seemed to attain the initial stage of 'cosmic consciousness'. He was aware of his inner existence as well as that of the whole universe, in which there seems to be revelation for him. In his pioneering book *Cosmic Consciousness* Dr R M Bucke divided human consciousness into three stages: simple consciousness, self-consciousness and cosmic consciousness. According to Dr Bucke, the person who attains cosmic consciousness experiences emotional ecstasy, intellectual illumination, moral elevation and the sense of immortality.⁷ Obviously, Richard Jefferies has attained to the highest stage - cosmic consciousness. In his autobiography Jefferies more than once prays that from every blade of grass, the leaves of the trees, the song-notes of the birds, the sun, the air and the clouds, and from the whole universe, he might take their energy, grandeur, and beauty, and gather it into him. 'That I might have the deepest soul-life, the deepest of all, deeper far than all this greatness of the visible universe and even of the invisible; that I might have a fullness of soul till now unknown, and utterly beyond my own conception.'⁸ He is identifying himself with the universe and trying to take the life force from the universe.

Allied to this is Jefferies' idea of returning to nature after death. He wants to be:

burned on a pyre of pinewood, open to the air, and placed on the summit of the hills.

Then let my ashes be scattered abroad - not collected in an urn - freely sown wide and broadcast. That is the natural interment of man - of man whose Thought at least has been among the immortals; interment in the elements . . . let the tawny flame lick up the fragment called the body; there cast the ashes into the space it longed for while living.⁹

Though he realised that he would not be able to afford it, as such a style of interment could be only for the wealthy, Jefferies thought this would be the ideal way to resolve into the elements. Once he refers to the human body as a 'temporary frame'.¹⁰ This recalls traditional Chinese thinking. There is a saying in Chinese that both burials and weddings are happy occasions ('Hong Bai Xi Shi'), which reflects the philosophical attitude of Chinese people towards death. That is, to die of old age is to 'return'; death should not be mourned, but celebrated, as we do weddings and births. There is no deep sorrow in it. For, as ancient Chinese understood it, we live temporally on the earth. As a famous ancient poet, Li Bai, expressed it, everything including human beings, are passers-by in this world between sky and earth; and time itself, like a traveller, quickly passes by. Li Bai, who was one of the great poets of the Tang dynasty (AD 618-906) when Chinese ancient poetry matured and reached its peak, has become a household

word for Chinese people and a symbol of ancient Chinese poetry. He produced about 900 poems. Some are eulogies of highly moral historical figures, some are depictions of picturesque landscapes and panoramas of common folk life, some are expressions of his unfulfilled political ambitions, some extol the soldierly spirit of patriotic warriors and generals. He was deeply influenced by Confucianism and Taoism and chivalry, and believed in retiring after success and fame. Oriental thinking, including Buddhism, holds such views, emphasising the ephemeral state of human existence while at the same time reconciling people to the idea that in death we 'return' rather than 'perish'. Similarly Jefferies arrived at the idea that human beings are part of the whole (nature or universe), so that there is no real death as far as soul is concerned. Salt was right to call him a 'thinker', 'a pagan, a pantheist, a worshipper of earth and sea, and of the great sun "burning in the heaven"; he yearned for a free, natural, fearless life of physical health and spiritual exaltation, and for a death in harmony with the life that preceded it.'¹¹

2. There is no design, no purpose in nature.

Jefferies' view on nature has two sides. On the one hand, he is passionate about it, loves nature wholeheartedly; on the other hand, he is keenly aware that nature is a separate entity, totally indifferent to the existence of human beings, and he even goes so far as to point out the anti-human or outre-human character of nature. 'There is nothing human in the whole round of nature. All nature, all the universe that we can see, is absolutely indifferent to us . . . the whole, of nature and of the universe is distinctly anti-human ... outre-human, in the sense of beyond, outside, almost grotesque in its attitude towards, would nearly convey it . . . All the designless, formless chaos of chance-directed matter, without idea or human plan ... All nature, the universe as far as we see, is anti- or ultra-human, outside, and has no concern with man.'¹² Hence readers are presented with the sorrowful and moving descriptions of suffering human beings in 'Hours of Spring'. And this is how Amaryllis makes her appearance in the opening chapter of *Amaryllis at the Fair*, she finds the first daffodil flowering and runs to call her father to come and see it. On her way she comes face to face with the keen blast of the east wind. After describing how she battles her way on, Jefferies articulates his idea of nature's indifference towards human beings: 'the wind had blown thus round that corner every March for a century, and in no degree abated its bitter force because a beautiful human child, full of the happiness of a flower, came carelessly into its power. Nothing ever shows the least consideration for human creatures.'¹³

In 'Hours of Spring' the writer laments that nature is indifferent to him, and it is the 'old error: I love the earth, therefore the earth loves me -I am her child -I am Man, the favoured of all creatures. I am the centre, and all for me was made'.¹⁴ He has sadly come to realise the bitter truth: 'Nature sets no value upon life neither of minute hill-snail nor of human being'. 'The earth is all in all to me, but I am nothing to the earth'.¹⁵ He goes on to give a moving account of the human beings driven to the door by the north wind. They are starving, struggling to survive in the frozen cold of winter.

'Nature and the earth ... did not trouble about him . . . Nothing for man!'¹⁶ The old gypsy woman comes and tells about her daughter giving birth to twins in the midst of the snow and frost because they cannot make a fire, having little food and no clothes. And she is proud of her daughter's hardihood. Then Jefferies gives vent to his bitter feelings: 'Not even for the babes did the snow cease or the keen wind rest... No kindness to man, from birth-hour to ending; neither earth, sky, nor gods care for him, innocent at the mother's breast.'¹⁷ Next he recounts the scene of a thrush starving to death in the cold, such a 'terrible scene of torture to the birds'. 'Neither for the thrushes nor for the new-born infants in the tent did the onslaught of the winter slacken. No pity in earth or heaven.'*

'Wild Flowers' is another beautiful piece of writing imbued with this thought, that there is no design, no purpose in nature. But he also points out that the beauty of nature lies in its being 'without plan' - 'these designs of flower and leaf and colours of the sun cannot be reduced to set order'." Just as Jefferies came with sorrow to the conclusion 'that there is no object, no end, no purpose, no design, and no plan', he began to see 'how much more grandeur, beauty and hope there is in divine chaos - not chaos in the sense of disorder or confusion but simply the absence of order - than there is in a universe made by pattern.'²⁰ Because it seems to him that 'logically, that which has a design or purpose has a limit', and in this divine chaos, with no 'contracted order', there is 'limitless hope and possibilities'.²¹

3. The beauty of nature versus the suffering of human life.

As a lover of nature, Jefferies depicted a beautiful and idyllic landscape of the countryside, the fields, fresh air, birds, flowers, trees, grass and the change of seasons. But he wrote other works 'describing the realities of rural life behind the scenes',²² for example 'The Field-Play', 'Golden Brown', 'The Acorn Gatherer' and 'One of the New Voters'. These works make up a small portion of his *oeuvre* but are nevertheless significant, since they fully reveal the reality of human labour and the rude life behind the beautiful pastoral scene. The main artistic technique of expression in these works is contrast.

Nowhere is this technique more fully used than in 'The Field-Play'. It consists of two parts, 'Uptill-A-Thorn' and 'Rural Dynamite'. The short story's main theme is the wretched life of rural people. And this wretchedness is made more pathetic when set off by contrast with a peaceful and beautiful nature.

At the beginning, Dolly is a beautiful young country girl, light-hearted, and living happily in harmony with nature. 'A ready smile on the face, and a smile in the form . . . the laughing lips, the laughing shape, the eyes that melted so near to tears ... talking with the waggoner, helping a child to pick watercress, patting the shepherd's dog, finding a flower .. '²³ 'Gay she was, as the brilliant poppies who, having the sun as their own, cared for nothing else.'²⁴ After she suffered 'the great wrong', she declined until at last she lost an eye, became a ragged ugly creature, and ended her life in the workhouse, 'broken, hollow-chested, a workhouse fixture.'²⁵ The author uses contrast in two ways: nature contrasts with Dolly - nature remains unchanged, but Dolly is

changed for the worse, beyond recognition. The poppies came 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 waggon-wheel had rolled.¹²¹ Wang Fuzhi (1619-1692), an eminent Chinese thinker and art critic, once pointed out, to make grief felt by the reader a thousand times more keenly, the author needs to set it off by the contrast of a happy scene, and vice versa.

Dolly at the beginning contrasts with Dolly at the end - young, carefree and beautiful at the beginning contrasts with her image at the end of the story: ugly and broken. The writer describes her eyes with much compassion. As she appears at the beginning, her eyes are very beautiful: The softest of brown eyes under long eyelashes; eyes that seemed to see everything in its gentlest aspect, that could see no harm anywhere'.²⁷ After she suffered 'the great wrong', 'the change was most noticeable in her eyes; soft and tender still, brown and velvety, there was a deep sadness in them - the longer she looked at you, the more it was visible'.²⁸ Then Mat hits her in the eye, and one eye is gone. The soft, brown velvet, the laugh, the tear gone for ever... The exquisite structure which reflected the trees and flowers, and took to itself the colour of the summer sky, was shapeless.¹²⁹

The second part 'Rural Dynamite' focuses on the wretched life of male folk in the country. Mr Roberts and Bill lead hard enough lives, but more surprisingly and unexpectedly, Big Mat is caught as the incendiary and sent to penal servitude. It was Mat who directly caused Dolly's decline and miserable end, and it was Mat who caused so much agony to Roberts, but the author's antipathy is not so strong as his sympathy for Mat. As Jefferies points out, Mat 'did not himself know why he did it', and he was only the victim of 'that intense, brooding moroseness, that wormwood hatred' which 'does not often understand itself'.¹³⁰ Yet the author understands it. Here again, contrast is used. Jefferies touches upon the root of these events, reveals the reality behind the rural scene: 'Never was the distinction so sharp between the poor - the sullen poor ... and the well-to-do. The contrast now extends to everyone who can afford a black coat... the contrast is with every black coat'.¹³¹

This voice is echoed in 'Golden Brown'. In this short essay, the author uses at least five times the word 'beautiful', the beautiful colour - golden brown. But this beautiful colour is in sharp contrast to the hatred or hostility in the rural women's eyes. These women are the owners of the beautiful golden brown complexions which the author admires so much. Also their beautiful colour is contrasted with the coarseness described at the end of the essay: 'the men swore, but the women did worse. It is impossible to give a hint of the language they used. . . The two golden-brown girls were so heavily intoxicated, they could but stagger to and fro and mouth and gesticulate'.¹³²

In 'The Acorn Gatherer' the author uses an idyllic and poetic scene to set off the tragic life of the boy. The opening lines give the reader a beautiful picture and the first words are like a nursery rhyme: 'Black rooks, yellow oak leaves, and a boy asleep at the foot of the tree'.¹¹¹ Nature is beautiful, but human life is miserable, if even little children cannot get their share of joy.

In 'One of the New Voters' Roger's miserable brutish life is contrasted with the beautiful natural world, and his numbness is more pitiable when set off by the pastoral scene. As Jefferies writes at the essay's close: 'I am simply describing the realities of rural life behind the scenes. The golden harvest is the first scene; the golden wheat, glorious under the summer sun. Bright poppies flower in its depths, and convolvulus climbs the stalks. Butterflies float slowly over . . . to watch the sunset by it, and see it pale under the changing light, is a delight to the thoughtful mind . . . Behind these beautiful aspects comes the reality of human labour... - hours upon hours of heat and strain; there comes the reality of a rude life, and in the end little enough of gain. The wheat is beautiful, but human life is labour.'³⁴

4. What use should man make of nature?

In *The Story of My Heart*, while Jefferies exclaims that nature does not exist for us, and there is no purpose in nature, he is also aware that creatures in nature 'originally existed like the wheat, for themselves; we utilise them',³⁵ That is, we can make good use of nature. We can utilise nature to our best advantage.

In practical terms, as an example of how to make use of nature, the reader can see in Jefferies' original essay 'Aerial Navigation, Flight of Birds and Insects' that through careful observation of the flight of insects and birds, by looking at their physical and outward structure, man can see a means of aerial navigation if he can solve certain technical problems. Jefferies suggests that 'the dragon-fly would be the best model for the external shape of an airship: the wing cases representing the inclined plane, the tail enabling it to manoeuvre with singular dexterity'.³⁶ Finally, from all his observations, he draws the 'assured conviction that aerial navigation is a certainty of the future.'³⁷ Was it not foresight and genius to predict such a thing, years before the first aeroplane was invented? Orville and Wilbur, the Wright brothers, invented the first powered aeroplane in 1903, its successful maiden flight being recorded in history. They applied for a patent for their 'flying machine'. Jefferies' idea came directly from nature. It is from nature that man can learn a lot. Nature can be our exemplar.

Spiritually, nature generally arouses a kind of aspiration in our heart by its beauty ('Wild Flowers') and by its prodigality, which is in contrast to human niggardliness. After describing the beautiful lavishness of nature and giving utterance to his heartfelt admiration for it, Jefferies said longingly: 'I love beyond all things to contemplate this indescribable lavishness - I would it could be introduced into our human life.'³⁸

Because, as he commented bitterly more than once, the age he lived in was 'a mean and penurious age. It is formal and in order; there is no heart in it.'³⁹ The Victorian period was a period when thrift, hard work and economy were preached, and mammon-worship dominated society, yet there were such horrible pictures of human suffering. In Jefferies' eyes, the selfish accumulation of wealth and the worship of money are not in line with the exemplar of nature: 'Thrift, economy, accumulation of

wealth are inventions; they are not nature . . . represent a stage of things contrary to the exemplar of nature, and in individual life they destroy its beauty.'⁴⁰ It is turning to nature, to introduce its prodigality and splendid lavishness into human life, that will

help man to overcome selfishness and lift up the human spirit. 'So it has ever been to me, by day or by night, summer or winter, beneath trees the heart feels nearer to that depth of life the far sky means. The rest of spirit found only in beauty ideal and pure . . .'⁴¹ Jefferies points out that by coming to the embrace of nature he found 'pleasure', 'joy' and 'delight', and thus became 'happy' and 'pleased'. Man could learn from nature in that the ideal of nature can affect human aspiration and art. We should lead a natural life, beautiful without artificialities. In 'Nature in the Louvre' Jefferies connected the ideal beauty of nature with the ideal good of man.⁴² In *Amaryllis at the Fair* Alere's truthfulness and his fine artistic taste are closely associated with his deep attachment to nature.

Barry Reay observed in his book *Rural Englands* that 'landscape art was a luxury commodity in the nineteenth century, and its purchasers and dealers wanted the inhabitants and workers of the rural scene to be equally picturesque'.⁴³ Victorian drawing-rooms were decorated with such landscape paintings which portrayed a countryside in which nature was presented as most 'pure' and 'simple' while the realities of the labourers' hard lives were marginalised and became invisible, and even if visible, were romanticised in order to cater for the taste of middle- and upper-class viewers. Aesthetic taste was dominated by false delicacy and romanticization.⁴⁴ Most painters did their works to 'please', for the leisure and pleasure of middle and upper class. One notorious example is 'The Stonebreaker' by John Brett (1858), which is full of artificiality in spite of its beautiful landscape. As Jefferies put it, 'most of the landscape-painting in vogue today is nature in a dress-coat'.⁴⁵ Alere Flamma in *Amaryllis at the Fair*, because of his artistic integrity, refuses to draw to please, and even gives up opportunities to make large sums of money. He cannot make-believe, and 'he could draw what he saw with his own eyes, but not what other people wanted him to see'.⁴⁶ What he has drawn - the wild flowers by the footpaths, in the lanes and woods at Coombe Oaks - are exactly as he has found them, 'not formed into an artificial design, not torn up by the roots, or cut and posed for the occasion'.⁴⁷ Alere is content with the ten pounds he makes from his work and uses some of this small sum to help the poor and unfortunate, and care for his old mother. He is an artist figure full of compassion for his fellow creatures, and his works 'were absolutely true to nature and fact'.⁴⁸ The character of Alere expresses Jefferies' conviction that the reconciliation of nature with the humanist ideal can produce the true and the beautiful. It is by looking to nature that we can attain to the human ideal.

Another use of nature is its healing and consoling power. 'Human suffering is so great, so endless, so awful that I can hardly write of it... so immense is the misery of man'.⁴¹ As a 'student of nature and human life' Jefferies was keenly aware of this. He did not fail to observe that nature could provide a kind of haven to those who suffered.

In *Amaryllis at the Fair*, when Amadis and Alere first come to Coombe Oaks (Iden's place), they are pale and obviously in poor health. After a period of time at Coombe Oaks, in natural and beautiful surroundings, they experience a period of convalescence and recover considerably. Their health begins to return, though each to

a different degree. Iden, according to the writer, is 'Nature in human shape', the personification of the ideal of nature.⁵⁰

The closing chapter of *Hodge and His Masters* provides an example to illustrate this from the contrary viewpoint. The death of the aged labourer is tragic. He loses his ability to work in old age, and is taken to the workhouse as nobody can look after him at home. But even though 'the food, the little luxuries, the attention were far superior to anything he could possibly have had at home', 'the windows did not permit him from his bed to see the leafless trees or the dark woods and distant hills'.⁵¹ In the workhouse, the dormitories are clean, but in his old cottage bedroom at home 'as he woke in the morning he could hear the sparrows chirping, the chaffinch calling, and the lark singing aloft'.⁵² Shut up in the workhouse, he misses the plum- and apple-trees in his own garden. He dies in the workhouse where he 'ceased to exist by imperceptible degrees, like an oak-tree'.⁵³ Can an old oak tree survive after being uprooted from its natural soil? Can the labourer go on living after being transplanted into such a man-made, unnatural place as the workhouse?

The reader's attention should be again drawn to Dolly's tragedy in 'The Field-Play'. Dolly has suffered great wrong, but 'open air and green fields were to her life itself. Heart miseries are always better borne in the open air'.⁵⁴ She survives a little while, though her health deteriorates. But it is after being shut up in the workhouse that she totally breaks down. The workhouse 'was situated in a lovely spot.. hills covered afar with woods. Meads at hand, corn fields farther away, then green slope . . . larks sang in spring, in summer the wheat was golden, in autumn the distant woods were brown and red and yellow.' Thus the 'miserable wretches' are always *gazing* out at them from the windows of their 'prison', so 'windows on that side were accordingly built up and bricked in that they might not look out'.⁵⁵ What is manifested here is Jefferies' idea that nature has such great healing power that if human beings are denied access to it or even the sight of it, are shut up in the inhuman and unnatural workhouse, cut off from nature, they will not recover from their illness, neither physically nor spiritually. Here I would like to quote the words of H S Salt: 'All life, whether social or individual, that is permanently divorced from communion with the vitalising influences of free air and sunshine, will be a stunted and diseased life; and to the long disuse and degradation of natural instinct, until artificiality has become dominant in every phase of our existence, must be attributed the present numerous evils of civilised mankind'.⁵⁶

It is right that we should learn from nature, and utilise it to our best advantage, but what if we don't, or if we misuse it? The result can be disastrous and catastrophic, as described in the nightmarish picture of *After London*. Polluted air, yellow vapour, and subtle poisonous emanations from the black, hard and burned earth nearly deaden Felix's nerves and narcotise him. There are skeletons and, most terrible of all, the walls of past buildings and houses, white as snow, fell at a mere touch, and in some places 'the crystallized wall had fallen of itself . . . Whether the walls had been of bricks or stone or other material he could not tell; they were now like salt'.⁵⁷ Later the hero Felix realises that this desolate and ghastly place is 'the site of the mightiest city of former days. The deserted and utterly extinct city of London was under his feet'.⁵⁸

Then Jefferies gives vent to his deep concern, criticizing our modern civilization in pursuing too much artificiality and exploiting nature relentlessly: 'He had penetrated into the midst of that dreadful place, of which he had heard many a tradition: how the earth was poison, the water poison, the air poison, the very light of heaven, falling through such an atmosphere, poison. There were said to be places where the earth was on fire and belched forth sulphurous fumes, supposed to be from the combustion of the enormous stores of strange and unknown chemicals collected by the wonderful people of those times.'⁵⁹

After London is a warning and a calling to people to return to natural living, to treat nature, our earth, as our home, to utilise it, but also protect it. Look at our environment today: air pollution, global warming, bird flu, earthquakes, tsunamis, and the thousand sophisticated ways of life in our modern society. Jefferies' warning deserves better attention. *After London* is really meaningful today. Let us dispense with so much extravagance and artificiality; let us lead a natural and healthy life, in harmony with nature.

In sum, man is part of nature and should learn to live in harmony with it. Though there is no design and purpose in nature, nothing human in nature, and the misery of human life is in sharp contrast with natural beauty, man can seek spiritual comfort in nature, take strength from it, and the human heart can be lifted up. It is through learning from the ideal of nature than mankind can hope to attain to the ideal of human life - beauty and harmony.

Notes

1. Richard Jefferies, *The Old House at Coate*, ed. S J Looker (London and Redhill Lutterworth Press, 1948) p 65.
2. Richard Jefferies, *The Story of My Heart*, ed. S J Looker (London: Constable Publishers, 1947) p 23.
3. Ibid, p 78.
4. Richard Jefferies, *The Old House at Coate*, ed. S J Looker (London and Redhill: Lutterworth Press, 1948) p 34-7.
5. Yang Min, Wang Keqi and Wang Hengzhan, *An Outline of the Traditional Chinese Culture* (Qingdao: China Ocean University Press, 2002) p 30-31.
6. Ibid., for detailed discussion see p 30-31.
7. Richard Maurice Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness* (New York: E P Dutton, 1969).
8. Richard Jefferies, *The Story of My Heart*, ed. S J Looker (London: Constable Publishers, 1947) p 27.
9. Ibid, p 45.
10. Ibid, p 42.
11. Henry S Salt, *Richard Jefferies: His Life & Hi's Ideals* (London: Arthur C Fifield, 1905) p92.
12. Richard Jefferies, *The Story of My Heart*, ed. S J Looker (London: Constable Publishers, 1947) p 51-4.
13. Richard Jefferies, *After London and Amaryllis at the Fair*, ed. Ernest Rhys (London: J M Dent & Sons Ltd, 1939) p 202.
14. Richard Jefferies, *Field and Hedgerow* (London: Longmans, Green and Co Ltd, 1926) p4.

15. Ibid, p 5.
16. Ibid, p 9.
17. Ibid. p 11.
18. Ibid, p 13.
19. Richard Jefferies, *The Open Air* (London: J M Dent & Sons Ltd, n.d.) p 44. Richard Jefferies, *The Old House at Coate*, ed. S J Looker (London and Redhill: Lutterworth Press, 1948) p 64,66.
- Ibid, p 67.
22. Richard Jefferies, *The Open Air* (London: J M Dent & Sons, n.d.) p 106.
23. Richard Jefferies, *The Life of the Fields*, ed. S J Looker (London and Redhill: Lutterworth Press, 1947) p 21-2.
- Ibid, p 25. Ibid, p 41.
26. Ibid, p 28.
27. Ibid, p 21.
28. Ibid, p 26.
29. Ibid, p 27.
30. Ibid, p 41.
31. Ibid, p 37.
32. Richard Jefferies, *The Open Air* (London: J M Dent & Sons, n.d.) p 32.
33. Richard Jefferies, *The Life of the Fields*, ed. S J Looker (London and Redhill: Lutterworth Press, 1947) p 43.
34. Richard Jefferies, *The Open Air* (London: J M Dent & Sons, n.d.) p 106-7.
35. Richard Jefferies, *The Story of My Heart*, ed. S J Looker (London: Constable Publishers, 1947) p 54.
36. Richard Jefferies, *The Old House at Coate*, ed. S J Looker (London and Redhill: Lutterworth Press, 1948) p 75.
37. Ibid, p 81.
38. Ibid, p 68. Ibid, p 69. Ibid, p 70-71.
- Richard Jefferies, *The Open Air* (London: J M Dent & Sons, n.d.) p 33.
42. Richard Jefferies, *Field and Hedgerow* (London: Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd, 1926) p 263-4.
43. Barry Reay, *Rural Englands* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) p 176.
44. Ibid, p 174-7.
45. Richard Jefferies, *After London and Amaryllis at the Fair*, ed. Ernest Rhys (London: J M Dent & Sons Ltd. 1939) p 317.
- Ibid, p 316.
47. Ibid, p 316-7.
48. Ibid, p 317.
49. Richard Jefferies, *The Story of My Heart*, ed. S J Looker (London: Constable Publishers, 1947) p 97.
50. Richard Jefferies, *After London and Amaryllis at the Fair*, ed. Ernest Rhys (London: J M Dent & Sons Ltd, 1939) p 309.
51. Richard Jefferies, *Hodge and His Masters* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1949) p310
52. Ibid, p 309.
53. Ibid, p 310.
54. Richard Jefferies, *The Life of the Fields*, ed. S J looker (London and Redhill: Lutterworth Press, 1947) p 42.
55. Ibid, p 42.

56. Henry S Salt, *Richard Jefferies: His Life & His Ideals* (London: Arthur C Fifield, 1905) p74.

57. Richard Jefferies, *After London and Amaryllis at the Fair*, ed. Ernest Rhys (London: J M Dent & Sons Ltd, 1939) p 168.

58. *Ibid*, p 169.

59. *Ibid*, p 169.

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