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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 a Summer *Journal*, 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).

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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.

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Beatrice and the Centaur: A Fantasy

Richard Jefferies

(Untitled – Samuel Looker’s title. Based on Jefferies’ hand-writing, Looker puts it as a late work around 1885)

Beatrice entered the library and locked the heavy door behind her. She walked across the enlarged blue and yellow stains on the carpet, where the summer evening sunlight came through the coloured glass of the window, and sat down at the central table. Reaching out her hand, she took hold of a bronze ornament which stood on the table and placed it immediately in front of her. This ornament was a miniature copy of a famous Centaur in the Vatican.

Her soft warm fingers passed gently down the groove on the Centaur’s back, feeling the bronze as if it were flesh and alive under her hand. The metal warmed beneath her touch, and kept the heat some while after the pressure of her fingers was gone; but a little more and it seemed as if she would have animated the creature with her own transfused vitality.

From the back her touch was removed to the chest – the man’s chest – where the strong muscles swelling formed two rising prominences like a woman’s bust. Instead of the founts of love and the very symbols of gentleness, these breasts represented vast strength, with which ferocity is frequently associated. But this species of ferocity is not without its charm to certain natures. Her hand pressed firmly on the breasts till they glowed with the warmth of her blood.

Lower down, the Centaur possessed a second bosom: that of a horse, softer, smoother; a pleasing outline, far more suggestive of tenderness than the man’s. This part of the neck of a horse, just between and above the forelegs, is very difficult to draw, because it approximates to the curves of the feminine form; and that, again, may be traced to the vane whose motion generates beauty. It is difficult to draw, and it is this part which renders a fine horse so handsome as he prances past, preceded as it were by this lovely curve, varying with his steps. There is a little of woman in it, and perhaps that is why horses are so beloved.

Beatrice took no pleasure in this second bosom: it was too much like the curves of her own body; but she felt the firm arms, and the powerful flanks. Then her eyes partly closed, and, reclining in her chair, she let her fancy reconstruct the Centaur as in life.

She saw the low, broad, forehead crowned with clustering curls, short, thick and matted; the dark, bright eyes and the white eyeballs, brilliantly white, which indicated something of equine violence. The

ears were small, and set very close to the head; the nose, a little flattened or wide; the lips, straight and thick. She did not shrink from the broad nose or the full lips; the coarseness which accompanies great strength is sometimes acceptable. His neck was round as a tower; his shoulders wide and massive; upon his arms and chest there was a growth of short ringlets which hid the skin: like a shirt of fine chain mail. These curling ringlets lower down melted insensibly into the close-lying hair of the horse.

His breath at each expiration streamed from his nostrils in two diverging lines.

His long and pointed tongue, red as blood, occasionally appeared between his lips and licked them at the corners.

A slight odour emanated from his person, not that of a horse nor of a human being; it was strong, but not repellent, and pleasant to her senses. Like some powerful narcotic, this peculiar odour soothed her and threw her into a still deeper trance of imagination. It partly arose from the strange mingling of horse and man; partly from the sweet herbs, and fruits, the flowers he had cropped in the deep vales of Thessaly. The first gave it its potency; the second, its sweetness.

From the earth he took up a huge stone, seizing it by a ring which had been let into it, and lifting the monstrous fragment over his shoulder – she marked the rise and swell of the muscle – cast it hurtling down the declivity, to bounce and hum and spin and shatter itself among his enemies at the foot of the mountain.

The view of this immense effort, achieved in repose, caused her bosom to heave with admiration.

He shouted, and his voice, rolling, filled the hollow of the hills; they trembled at their tops and vibrated at the sound, as if one had sharply struck the rim of a brazen pitcher.

He saw her and she fled: she heard the thunder of his hoofs on the dry, warm sward; she fled, but without fear; she looked back, and he seized her in his arms; she felt the soft ringlets of his chest. With light bounds he carried her, pressed to his mighty heart, through woods and rivers, to the recesses of his haunt. On the soft and flowery grass, in the shadow of the trees, under the grape-clusters, there the potent perfume of his breath, full of the richness of sweet herbs, overcame her and she slept in his arms.

Beatrice really did sleep, so vivid had been her dream. Exhausted by vehement and long-continued emotion, she slumbered deeply; how exquisite it is sometimes to be utterly unconscious while still alive! For a long – a very long time – she had scarcely rested, and this deep draught of unconsciousness was an intense enjoyment. Of this kind of

sleep, this utter and full repose, the sleeper is often quite aware, and yet quite lost to the usual impressions of the senses. She heard nothing, saw nothing; yet she knew she slept. Beneath the recognized senses there seems another – the sense or knowledge of oneself – and when the fleshly senses lose their sensibility in repose, this deeper feeling remains unaffected. In some, it cannot be put to sleep; to them it is a source of the greatest pleasure or the keenest misery; for, if unhappy, they cannot forget it, even in the night; if happy, they do not lose a moment of their joy.

Beatrice slept, and every process by which life is sustained was partly suspended. Life is drawn from the air – oxygen; from food and drink. She was not eating or drinking, and the frequency of her inhalations was lessened. But, to confound science, from her slumber she was drawing more life than food or wine or oxygen had afforded her for weeks. There is some source, therefore, of life, or some knowledge, of which science is ignorant, and the wonder is it is always so certain that it knows everything. Out of this slumber she would arise twice as strong and twice as passionate.

In such a woman as this, there is a good deal to confound science.

It was only just that she should ultimately obtain such repose as this in the library; the room in which she had been made to suffer so much at the hands and mouths of many species of master and professor. It was a partial compensation for the hardships they had inflicted upon her, poor girl, with their accursed instruction. She slept in the arms of the Centaur, the very incarnation of that physical life which the professors regarded with horror.

After a bee in the window had buzzed in vain and climbed a hundred times over the coloured glass, the stained sunlight on the carpet came to the edge of the table and the white beam preceding it advanced to the miniature hoofs of the bronze statuette.

Far back in the mists of antiquity, the same sun had shone on the living Centaur, half horse, half man, as he gathered fruits in the north of Greece, as he reposed in the noontide heat in the shade of the forest, or stood knee-deep in the cooling water of the river. With a branch torn from a tree he fanned his flanks and drove away the insects that annoyed him. A serpent gliding among the flowers caught his eye; he advanced his hoof and crushed out its hateful existence, for his intellect – strong with the physical strength of a horse – soared above the superstitions of his age. He trampled on the serpent, for the horny substance of his hoof secured him from the venomous tooth. He touched the grapes and left a mark where the bloom had adhered to his finger-tips; he felt them for the pleasure of the handling and

slightly compressed their enlarging skins of vine. He shook the trees and the ripe fruits fell bruised to the earth; the trees trembled, for he could have pulled them up by the roots.

There was the murmur of the river, pleasant in the heat of the day, and the song of the day cicada on the plane. Grateful for the same song, a Grecian poet many ages afterwards released a cicada entangled in a spider's web.

The sunlight sparkled as the breeze took the river at the curve; all the joy and glory of life is by the waters in the woods. It was in the days when Helen was born, before Troy, twice-burned already, was finally destroyed. Long ago, was it not? Yet, now, as then, the joy of life is in the sunlight.

The Centaur watched the sparkle on the river, listening to the grasshopper in the tree, musing in the shadow at noontide. He understood the wondrous beauty of the beautiful earth; its trees and plants; its flowers and grass; its waters and the winds that wander above them. Except you can see the life in the sunbeam, the life in the waters; unless you feel the life in the morning air, you cannot know the great joy of the Centaur. For the sunlight is not merely light, the water merely water, the air merely air; each is full of a subtle force, filling the material body with life, filling the immaterial soul with a sympathy for all. Without this sympathy, unless you see this mystery, the sun is no more than a candle, the water a bubble, and the air nothing. How strange that vast populations should be wholly blind and insensible to such light!

The Centaur watched and listened, and his heart was filled with wondering sympathy, for, although he saw and understood, yet he knew not whence came this marvel of life. His heart was filled with wondering sympathy and sadness for the shortness of the mystery of existence. The evil which arose so soon in the homes of man and the disease that slew tenfold more than the spear. That they might live was all his thought. Thus he pondered in the glory of the summer day.

In the evening; he descended to the village in the plain: and taking the heavy pitchers from the maidens carried them to the houses, from the spring. The boys thronged about him to ride upon his back: he taught them also to shoot with the bow. By moonlight he played upon the cithern for them and watched the dance he could not join. By day he laboured for them in the harvest field and without reward drew the leads homewards, ever desirous of human companionship and eager for their good.

An Introduction to ‘Beatrice and the Centaur’

Samuel J Looker*

(undated but circa 1965)

Entries in the note-books of Richard Jefferies show that he had read widely in Greek Mythology and was deeply interested in the subject all his life, for they range from early note-books in 1876 to those with entries written only a few weeks before his death in 1887. Further evidence is to be found in a very early essay left untitled among his papers. This was written around 1870. Under the title of ‘Hyperion’ I printed it for the first time in a volume *Beauty Is Immortal* in 1948, the Jefferies’ Centenary year. The essay is evocative of his love of the Ancients. Jefferies writes:

There was once a youth in an obscure country village, quite lost in the rudest and most illiterate county of the West, who passed a great part of his time reading books and dreaming, so much so that he was useless upon the farm. His name was Hyperion, and he might have been seen any sunny afternoon in June reclining (while everybody else was hard at work haymaking) upon a pile of poles, thrown together under some young walnut trees which stood in the field on the verge of the garden. Thus, with, the foliage over head to shield him from the scorching heat, and yet with the pleasant sunshine around him, and the green grass at his feet – grass on which, the eye rests with such a sense of luxury, green hedges and noble trees a little further away, and woods in the distance – he could enjoy the day and the summer with all his peculiar and delicate sensitiveness to beauty. The book, whatever it might be, was often put down on the poles at his side, the light wind turning the leaves as it wandered down from the June roses in the gateway, while Hyperion let his fancy present to him the real and lifelike – even more than that, the actual living and embodied figures of history and romance. The heroes of whom he read were not mere names; they were not words only, as words are arranged in a dictionary. Hyperion saw these men of the old times. He heard the distant whistle or the locomotive, but it could not remove the impression that the Greeks sailed for Troy only a day or two before yesterday. Yonder was the same sun, beneath the same earth, the barren ocean still rolled the waves about the rim. The ships that were beached by Troy had indeed rotted and disappeared, not a nail remained, but from the moment the last nail lost its existence the intervening time ceased to be. You could shout across it for Ulysses: the warrior passed before him, his hyacinthine locks, his powerful

* The Richard Jefferies Society is grateful to Mrs P Jacques (the widow of Looker’s grandson) for granting permission to publish the article.

frame, the far-seeing eye (the mind that could deceive, like the Gods on Olympus. Neither the swiftness of invincible Achilles, the strength of Ajax, the experience of Nestor, nor the chosen Agamemnon, none of these took Troy. It was Ulysses. It was Design, favoured by the Gods, of course, since nothing can be achieved by man in a world of chance and circumstance. Ulysses' thought triumphed: even the Gods gave way at last. As Hyperion could see Ulysses in bodily shape before him, bow in hand, so the mind of the classic hero was translated into his. He thought Ulysses, he lived Ulysses. Thus Homer's man became a part of his being, tinting his views and his hopes.

There are references again to Ulysses in the fine poem *Jefferies* printed at the end of his posthumous volume *Field and Hedgerow*. These references, with the evidence of the note-book entries show that the thought of Ulysses and its influence upon the mind of the young Jefferies is very clear. In youth he was almost obsessed by admiration of the Greeks, who were so responsive to an exquisite phrase or a beautiful gesture. Among his miscellaneous notes is an unprinted fragment:

The theories of old Greece were living I thought because the problems were still living before our eyes: Though search and science have altered the aspects of the facts on which these theories were built.

In the note-books again there are references to Laocoon, Ixion, Hercules, Jason, and Admetus. I knew too, from my study of his unpublished papers that Jefferies was excited by the heroic figure of the Centaur, Chiron, most famous of all the Centaurs, for he was 'wise and kindly, just, a friend of gods and heroes, and skilled in medicine, music and other arts. Achilles when young was brought up under his care and tuition, in his dwelling on Mount Pelion.' But, in spite of this I did not know that Jefferies had actually written a fictional sketch on the Centaur and a young girl; which is now printed in any form for the first time.

The legend of the Centaurs is one of the most attractive among all the rich embroidery of the Greeks. The imagination of the Greek was rich in invention. He loved to people wild and solitary places with legendary figures. It was usual to assign to these creatures a bodily form in harmony with the physical characteristics of the place. Pan, the spirit of hills and rocks had the legs of a goat. Scylla was the spirit of storms on the sea and possessed the body and tail of a fish. The Centaurs made their home in the mountains and the woods, where wild torrents dashed down the hillsides. Thessaly and Arcadia were their chief haunts. The Centaur had the body and legs of a horse, with the head, arms, and body of a man down to the waist. The horse to the Greeks was the symbol of swiftness, of the impetuous stream and the wind. Greek mythology is the most fascinating of all, like the spell thrown over travellers to this day by that wonderful land where the luminous sky, limpid air, pellucid streams, clear pure outlines of the mountains, with the strange attraction of the ancient

ruins, enchant the beholder. The lonely, self-absorbed country boy who was Jefferies was enthralled by the Greek spirit and felt in fullest sympathy with it. This hitherto unknown sketch, left without a title by its author, which I discovered by accident among some of his miscellaneous manuscripts, is delightful as well as unusual. Judged by handwriting, it is fairly late work, probably circa 1885, only two years before his early death. I call it, for obvious reasons 'Beatrice and the Centaur: A Fantasy'. I like it, not only for its intrinsic charm and the artistry of the writing but also because it is so different from what we expect from Jefferies' pen. Differences in the work of a writer one loves are always specially interesting and worthy of study, and Jefferies is at his best here. But although the body of the sketch is so out of Jefferies' usual run, there are some characteristic touches of nature lore here and there: 'The joy of life in the sunlight; the sparkle on the river; the song of the cicada; the shadow at noontide; the waters of the earth and the winds that wander above them.' More essential still of Jefferies' teaching is the thought:

that unless you can see the life in the sunbeam, the life in the waters; unless you feel the life in the morning air, you cannot know the great joy of the Centaur. Without this sympathy, unless you see this mystery, the sun is no more than a candle, the water a bubble, and the air nothing.

That is indeed the essential Jefferies, as shown in some of his greatest essays: 'The Dawn,' 'On the Downs,' 'Meadow Thoughts,' and 'Nature and Eternity.' Jefferies might well be enthralled by Greece and her story. The names of Phidias, Praxiteles, and Apelles, of Homer, Pindar, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides of Pericles and Demosthenes, or of Socrates, Plato and Epicurus, with those of Herodotus, Thucydides and Xenophon are without peer in the history of the world.

I close this short introduction to Jefferies' delightful Centaur sketch by an apposite quotation from one of his last essays, 'Nature and Books', which, in the main, is an attack on the uselessness of too many books and a plea to return to first principles, to unlearn much useless knowledge and 'take off peel after peel'. But Jefferies concludes:

Almost the only books left to me to read, and not to unlearn very much, are my first books – the graven classics of Greece and Rome, cut with a stylus so deeply into the tablet that they cannot be erased. In some way they had got the spirit of the earth and sea, the soul of the sun. This never dies; this I wish not to unlearn. By the mind, without instruments, the Greeks anticipated almost all our thoughts! By and by, having raised ourselves up upon these huge mounds of facts, we shall begin to see still greater things; to do so we must look not at the mound under foot, but at the starry horizon.

The Windhover and Richard Jefferies

Roger Ebbatson

First published in English in 1974

In 'The Downs', the opening chapter of Richard Jefferies' *Wild Life in a Southern County*, there is this description of a hawk in flight:

As the breeze strikes him aslant his course he seems to fly for a short time partly on one side, like a skater sliding on the outer edge.

A couple of pages later we find this:

. . . The furrows look as if traced with a ruler, and exhibit curious effects of vanishing perspective. Along the furrow, just as it is turned, there runs a shimmering light as the eye traces it up. The ploughshare, heavy and drawn with great force, smooths the earth as it cleaves it, giving it for a time a 'face' as it were, the moisture on which reflects the light. If you watch the farmers driving to market, you will see that they glance up the furrows to note the workmanship and look for game; you may tell from a distance if they espy a hare by the check of the rein and the extended hand pointing.

This concatenation of images is remarkably similar, notwithstanding the more prosaic context, to that presented in Gerard Manley Hopkins's great sonnet. Yet no direct connection may be postulated: Jefferies' essay appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette* for May 1878, and Hopkins assigns *The Windhover* to 30 May 1877.¹ This unusual image-pattern evidently remained with Jefferies, since it recurs in his essay on 'Birds Climbing the Air', which appeared in the *St. James's Gazette* for 28 July 1883:

. . . one ceases to beat the air with his wings, stretches them to their full length, and seems to lean aside. His impetus carries him forward and upward, at the same time in a circle, something like a skater on one foot. (*Life of the Fields*, 1884.)

Jefferies also remarks here:

The hawk does not always ascend in a spiral, but every now and then revolves in a circle—a flat circle—and suddenly shoots up with renewed activity.

Jefferies devoted many pages to the mechanics of bird flight, in *Bevis*

¹ This invalidates the suggestion of W. C. Mercer that Hopkins might have read Jefferies before composing *The Windhover* (W. C. Mercer. *Notes and Queries*, vol. 197, 10 May 1952, p. 217).

(1882), in his notebooks, and especially in *The Old House at Coate* (1885; publ. 1948). In the latter he again relates flight to skating:

A swift skater conceives the will to turn, and immediately, without special effort, he turns: there is a connexion between the will and the steel bound to the foot. The bird desires to fly, to rise or turn, and the willpower, in some subtle manner, adjusts its mere mechanical means to the air. (*Old House*, ch. 9.)

The skater's curve 'on a bow bend' delighted Jefferies, who was remembered as an expert skater on Coate Water. His early essay on skating communicates this delight:

Here you may turn and revolve and twist and go through those endless evolutions and endless repetitions of curves which exercise so singular a fascination. ('Skating', *The Hills and the Vale*, 1909.)

Later in the same piece he launches into a panegyric whose animal energy echoes, in a crudely pagan mode, the feeling of Hopkins's opening lines:

the wind . . . strikes the chest like the blow of a strong man as you rush against it. The chest responds with a long-drawn heave, the pliable ribs bend outwards, and the cavity within enlarges, filled with the elastic air. The stride grows longer and longer—the momentum increases—the shadow slips over the surface; the fierce joy of reckless speed seizes on the mind. In the glow, and the speed, and the savage north wind, the old Norse spirit rises, and one feels a giant. Oh that such a sense of vigour—of the fulness of life could but last!

A poignant late essay, 'Hours of Spring' (1886), recreates this pleasure:

I joyed in his swift, careless flight, in the throw of his pinions, in his rush over the elms and miles of woodland; it was happiness to see his unchecked life. What more beautiful than the sweep and curve of his going through the azure sky? (*Field and Hedgerow*, 1889.)

That strange Hopkins image of the ploughed land transformed into shining furrows is also to be found elsewhere in Jefferies. The play of light, he observed, could effect a 'marvellous transformation of clods and cold matter into living things' ('The Pageant of Summer', *Life of the Fields*). Thus he once described a pond near Ewell:

Pond surface like glowing light some inches thick. Superincumbent—sparkling—sunshine. This from distance reflected low angle, near only a few ripples and no glow. By moonlight the furrows just turned by the plough glisten.² (Note for June 1880; *Notebooks*, 1948, p. 91.)

This patina recurs in a note about 'Polished furrows' (June 1883, *Notebooks*, p. 140), and in a description of the ploughshare and its

² An image which recurs in 'The Crows', *Nature Near London*.

‘gleam like silver as the plough turns at the end of the furrow’ (May 1881, *ibid.*, p. 110). The *Windhover* image, incidentally, is prefigured in Hopkins’ own journals, in a note of 3 May 1866:

On left, brow of the near hill glistening with very bright newly turned sods.’ (*Journals and Papers of G. M. Hopkins*, 1959, p. 133.)

Hopkins the Jesuit might have concurred with Jefferies the agnostic in his essay ‘On the Downs’ (1883):

Nor does it depend on the brilliant sun— this mere clod of earth will cause it, even a little crumble of mould. The commonest form of matter thus regarded excites the highest form of spirit. The feelings may be received from the least morsel of brown earth adhering to the surface of the skin on the hand that has touched the ground. Inhaling this deep feeling, the soul, perforce, must pray. (*The Hills and the Vale.*)

In ‘An English Deer-Park’, which appeared posthumously in 1888, Jefferies celebrated:

the distant plough, the share of which, polished like a silver mirror by friction with the clods, reflects the sunshine, flashing a heliograph message of plenty from the earth. (*Field and Hedgerow.*)

At other times also Jefferies has shared Hopkins’s vision. ‘Yesterday’, he wrote in ‘Hours of Spring’, ‘I saw the ploughman and his team, and the earth gleam smoothed behind the share.’ Six years earlier he had reported:

The day declined and from the clear, cold sky of March the moon looked down, gleaming on the smooth planed furrow where the plough had passed.³ (‘Wheatfields’, 1880; *Nature Near London*, 1883.)

Amid a host of general parallels which might be predicated of two passionate observers of nature, one further specific instance is worthy of note: at several points in Jefferies there are close affinities with the theme and substance of *Pied Beauty*?⁴

How fond Nature is of spot-markings!— the wings of butterflies, the feathers of birds, the surface of eggs, the leaves and petals of plants are constantly spotted; so, too, fish—as trout. From the wing of the butterfly I looked involuntarily at the foxglove I had just gathered; inside, the bells were thickly spotted—dots and dustings that might have been transferred to a butterfly’s wing. The spotted meadow-orchis; the brown dots on the cowslips; brown, black, greenish, reddish dots and spots and dustings on the eggs of the finches, the whitethroats, and so many others—so many of the spots seem as if they had been splashed on and had run into short

³ Hopkins’s word ‘sillion’, referring to a strip of land, is not found in Jefferies; but in *Red Deer* (1884) Jefferies describes an implement drawn by the plough, called a ‘sull’ or ‘zull’.

⁴ Cf. the whole tenor of ‘Nature and Books’.

streaks, some mottled, some gathered together at the end; all spots, dots, dustings of minute specks, mottlings, and irregular markings. The histories, the stories, the library of knowledge contained in those signs! ('The Pine Wood,' *The Open Air*, 1885.)

Jefferies was a Lamarckian, or optimistic evolutionist, and his refutation of the survival of the fittest, in *The Story of My Heart* (1883); gained him a measure of notoriety. Nonetheless, his interpretation of spot-marking would have satisfied the most orthodox Darwinian:

Nature protects them in this way to some extent from the many dangers which lie in wait for them, and enables them to survive in an otherwise difficult and hostile world.' ('Protection of Nature', late MS.; *Field and Farm*, 1957.)

In one of the last notes before his early death Jefferies reverted to this phenomenon, here emphasising the imperfections of the natural world:

Nature a careless printer, dabs the design butterfly's wing on to the margin and half off at the edges, and does not ink regularly, the colours of some species fainter. (May 1887; *Notebooks*, p. 283.)

This in no way diminished his sense of wonder; for him also nature was a Heraclitean bonfire:

There is scarcely a colour that cannot be matched in the gay world of wings. Red, blue, and yellow, and brown and purple-shaded and toned, relieved with dots arid curious markings; in the butterflies, night tints in the pattern of the under wings, as if these were shaded with the dusk of evening, being in shadow under the vane. Gold and orange, red, bright scarlet, and ruby and bronze in the flies. Dark velvet, brown velvet, greys, amber, and gold edgings like military coats in the wild bees. ('The Makers of Summer', 1887; *Field and Hedgerow*.)

There are also more metaphysical resemblances. A passage in *The Story of My Heart* may remind us of Hopkins's comment in *Hurrahing in Harvest* that 'these things were here and but the beholder Wanting':

Except when I walk by the sea, and my Soul is by it, the sea is dead.
Those seas by Which no man has stood—by which no soul has been . . .
are dead. No matter how majestic the planet rolls in space, unless a soul
be there it is dead. As I move about in the sunshine I feel in the midst of
the supernatural: in the midst of immortal things.

And there is an adumbration of inscape in Jefferies' passionate cry, 'I want the soul of the flowers' ('Nature and Books', *Field and Hedgerow*).

There can be no spurious tracing of influences and cross-fertilizations here. Jefferies could not have read Hopkins's poems, composed as they were, more or less *sub rosa*; and there is no evidence of Hopkins having read Jefferies. The comparative chronology

in any case makes borrowing an impossibility. Rather, analogous temperaments, utterly different by education and career, have attained a similar vision of the natural world. Indeed, Jefferies occasionally discloses a sacramental view of nature which is identical to that of the Hopkins's nature poems. In the first draft of *The Story of My Heart*, for instance, Jefferies reflects upon the necessity of knowing God through matter, 'since I can neither see, hear nor learn of You anywhere, it is only through these links that I can get at you—gazing upon a flower ... by these I beg and pray.' On a more mundane level, much in *Hodge and his Masters* (1880) might be read as a gloss on *Harry Ploughman*; and the lament for John Brown in Jefferies' last essay, 'My Old Village', possesses just the sweet gravity of *Felix Randal*. Finally, it might be justly claimed for Jefferies that the reader of his notebooks comes into contact with a strenuous and latterly anguished sensibility which has many points of contact with the Hopkins of the journals and terrible sonnets.



Richard Jefferies and Bird Life

Brian Morris

Described as something of a 'curiosity' among English nature writers, Richard Jefferies is one of the most enduring of the nineteenth century poet naturalists. For every generation seems to rediscover and reaffirm the importance of Jefferies, and his books and new anthologies of his essays continue to be regularly re-issued.

A pioneer ecologist and nature mystic, as well as a rural novelist and prose-poet of nature, Richard Jefferies was not a scientific naturalist. Unlike Gilbert White, who according to James Fisher 'started us all bird watching' and W.H. Hudson, Jefferies was in no sense a serious ornithologist. But he was an extremely perceptive observer of the natural world and always expressed a fascination for the habits and 'customs' of birds. And it was a life-long interest, though sadly, like Thoreau, Jefferies died at a very early age.

Jefferies first publication that relates to birds is a letter he wrote to the *Swindon Advertiser* on the birds of Swindon. He was then twenty three years old. The letter recalls how Jefferies had been walking down the High Street in Marlborough and caught sight of a book entitled *Birds of Marlborough*. Jefferies bought the book, and his letter consists largely of an annotated list of the birds he had encountered in the neighbourhood of Coate, where it was his pastime, he writes, 'to watch all nature enjoying itself.' Many of these notes, together with the observations on which they were based, were later to be incorporated in Jefferies' books and nature essays.

Around a hundred species of birds are described by Jefferies in his writings, a good deal less than those of the poet John Clare who knew from personal observation about 145 wild birds. Jefferies, however, wrote many specific essays that are largely focussed around bird life, and give rich descriptions of the habits and ecology of the common birds around Coate, as well as the birds he encountered in his walks on Exmoor, the Sussex Downs, and in the woods and meadows in the vicinity of Tolworth. Among his nature essays that largely focus on birds are the following: 'The Hovering of the Kestrel', 'Magpie Fields', 'The Water Colley', 'Birds Climbing the Air', 'House Martins', 'Flocks of Birds', 'Haunts of the Lapwing' and 'The Domestic Rook'. It is clear that although Jefferies, unlike White and Hudson, had little interest in identifying and naming birds, or in taxonomic matters, he had an especial interest in many bird species, and they are continually

invoked in his writings. These include, in particular, the following: the green woodpecker, jackdaw, magpie, rook, kingfisher, house martin, lapwing, wood pigeon, corncrake, moorhen and nightingale. Moreover, Jefferies writes as a pioneer ecologist not as an ornithologist or bird collector; he is therefore interested not only in the habits, life history and ecology of these commoner birds, but also of the relationship between birds and human life.

It is clearly beyond the scope of the present essay to discuss Jefferies' observations on all the many birds he encountered. I will instead simply highlight Jefferies' observations of six species; the nightingale, moorhen, corncrake, woodpigeon, lapwing and missel thrush.

In the nineteenth century the song of the nightingale seems to have been a familiar sound in the woods and coppices near Coate Farm, as well as around Tolworth in Surrey. Near the latter locality, a track from the old Malden Church is described by Jefferies as 'Nightingale Road', given the abundance of these song birds. When they first arrived in spring, Jefferies writes, 'nightingales are fond of searching for food in ash and birch coppice woodlands. On a warm May morning four or five nightingales were heard singing in these copses, sometimes from bushes, but even from branches of an elm tree overhanging the road.' Long before Eliot Howard, Jefferies described the territorial instincts of the nightingale, noting that birds along a hawthorn hedge on an upland downland track 'have a marked out range' which is strictly defined and beyond which they will not pass. Jefferies writes of the same phenomenon with regard to the common robin. As he writes: 'Each robin has to fight for his locality, and he has to make the best of his territory; if he trespassed on another bird's premises he would be driven away'. This is clearly an anticipation of the notion of 'territory' among birds, that was later explored in great depth in Eliot Howard's classic study *Territory in Bird Life* (1920).

Clearly associating the nightingale with the hawthorn bush, Jefferies' suggests that its song – the familiar, liquid 'jug, jug, jug!' – always sounded richer in the early morning and seemed the natural accompaniment to the sunlight, the flowers and the rustle of leaves. He writes elsewhere that the nightingale 'love hawthorn bushes' and that around Tolworth the nightingale is often found in association with the sedge reedling – which probably refers to the reed or sedge warbler.

The moorhen is a bird that Jefferies encountered very early in his life as it is one of the commonest birds around Coate Water. In *Bevis* Jefferies records the shooting of a 'moorcock' with a bow and arrow, as

well as the shooting of several moorhen, whether swimming or flying, along with coot and dabchick (little grebe). An island in Coate Water is described as a location that is 'full of moorhens'. As with the heron and other waterfowl, the moorhen was often eaten – both by the young Jefferies and by local cottagers. Moorhens were also trapped using gin traps, and Jefferies records that these birds shot at the right time of year were 'delicious eating'.

In her recollections of her early life around the end of the nineteenth century the naturalist Frances Pitt wrote (in *Country Years*, 1961) that the land rail or corncrake was a very common bird of cultivated land, and that its voice was a 'frequent nuisance of the summer night'. Writing in an earlier decade, Jefferies also continually affirms the abundance of the corncrake in southern England – both in Wiltshire and Surrey. In *Wildlife in a Southern County* Jefferies gave an enlivening and informative account of the habits of the corncrake, which took up residence in the meadows of Coate Farm during the summer months, especially when the grass had grown tall. These birds seemed to prefer mowing grass to arable fields, and always kept well out of sight. Unlike the moorhen, they had a great desire for concealment, and Jefferies remarks that this trait is more strongly marked in the corncrake than in any other bird. Their loud call 'crake, crake, crake', not unlike the turning of a wooden rattle, was heard throughout the summer months. It is difficult writes Jefferies, to tell from what place the cry proceeds, and this 'has given rise to the belief that the corncrake is a ventriloquist'. Yet Jefferies felt that this effect was due mainly to the corncrake's intrinsic concealment and his sudden movements.

The abundance and familiarity of the corncrake in the nineteenth century is reflected by the fact that John Clare wrote two poems specifically on this secretive bird. Since the 1930's the corncrake has disappeared from much of the English countryside, due mainly to the advent of the combine harvester together with the early cutting of the grass. It now breeds only in the Isle of Man, or on some of the more remote Scottish islands, and is a rare passage migrant elsewhere.

Along with the rook and magpie, there are probably more references to the woodpigeon in Jefferies writings than to any other bird. It was one of those birds which had enormously benefited from the 'pheasant craze' which entailed the establishment of many woods and coppices as game coverts. The woodpigeon was therefore abundant around Burderop Wood, and it was a bird that the young Jefferies often shot, sometimes with a muzzle loader. Paradoxically, he expressed both his aesthetic feelings for this 'beautiful bird', while at the same time taking

great delight in shooting them.

Jefferies wrote a great deal about the habits of the woodpigeon, often simply as casual asides: that woodpigeons have an especial fondness for acorns; that in their flight, they often make straight for a tree and slacken speed, and show every sign of choosing it, only to suddenly change course, and fly in a completely different direction; that woodpigeons feed also on haws, wheat and young beans; that even though appearing quite wild they have their regular 'routes and customs'; and, finally, that woodpigeons are pre-eminently birds of the woods. He writes regarding their call: 'The coo itself is not tuneful in any sense; it is coarse and hollow, yet it has a pleasant sound for me – a sound of woods and the forest.' Although Jefferies mentions the alternative name of the woodpigeon, the ring dove, and recognized the turtle dove – which nested in a copse near Surbiton – it is of interest that he makes no mention of the stock dove.

The lapwing was clearly a favourite bird of Jefferies, and one of the commonest birds of the nineteenth century – as common as rooks and crows. Also called peewit or green plover, during the winter months, both around Coate and Tolworth, these birds appeared in large flocks in the open fields, and Jefferies often noted flocks of several thousand lapwings. One essay on the wildlife of the Sussex downs is entitled 'Haunts of the Lapwing', for he notes that during the harsh, cold winter months the lapwing is the only sign of life on the downs. Many lapwings nested in the fields and meadows around Coate Farm, and Jefferies writes that when their nest is approached

the old bird flies up, circles round, and comes so near as almost to be within reach, whistling 'pee-wit, pee-wit' over your head. He seems to tumble in the air as if wounded and scarcely able to fly, and those who are not aware of his intention may be tempted to pursue, thinking to catch him. But so soon as you are leaving the nest behind he mounts higher, and wheels off to a distant corner of the field, uttering an ironical 'pee-wit' as he goes. (*Wildlife in a Southern County*, p.292)

Jefferies had a particular fondness for the missel thrush, the habits and ecology of which is frequently discussed in his writings. Described as a 'lonely bird' which likes open parkland, Jefferies recorded that a pair of missel thrushes had nested in a large yew tree at Coate for twelve successive years. It was, he writes, almost as if it was their 'ancestral home'. Outside the breeding season, Jefferies noted that the missel thrush often congregate in small groups in arable fields. Bold and determined birds, Jefferies recounts how they courageously defend their nests against crows and other intruders.

Blackbirds, fieldfares, redwings and the thrush (song thrush) are all

frequently described by Jefferies, and he never seems to weary of describing them, particularly their feeding habits. He thus gives a memorable account of a song thrush crushing snails on a stone anvil. But one particularly interesting observation is Jefferies' recording of the breeding of redwings at Coate one summer, although these birds were normally winter visitors only. Three or four pairs apparently nested close to the farm, and in typical Victorian fashion Jefferies shot one of the birds in order to affirm its identity. Common winter migrants, Jefferies had heard the redwings singing on the bough of an oak tree in spring. W.H. Hudson noted this unusual record in his well-known *British Birds* (1895).

It is somewhat confusing, of course, that Jefferies often employs generics, such as 'woodpecker', 'gull' and 'swallow' in describing various birds. But Jefferies was an observant naturalist and it is clear that he was able to distinguish between closely related species. With regard to warblers, for example, Jefferies clearly identifies the many species, although often employing archaic (ie local) terminology. He thus gives some interesting natural history data on the whitethroat (or nettle creeper), blackcap, grasshopper lark (warbler), chiff-chaff, willow wren (warbler), and sedge reedling (warbler). He appears not to recognize (and so mention) the wood warbler, garden warbler and lesser whitethroat, or to distinguish between the sedge and reed warbler (which seem to be bracketed together as the sedge reedling). Often Jefferies seems to conflate the sedge reedling (reed warbler) and the brook sparrow (reed bunting); in other contexts however he clearly identifies the reed bunting – the reed sparrow, a 'graceful bird with a crown of glossy black'.

Jefferies again seems to use the term 'hawk' to cover both the sparrow hawk and the kestrel: yet from the context, and given the clarity of Jefferies' descriptions, it is usually clear whether Jefferies' observations refer to the sparrow hawk (preying largely on birds) or to the kestrel. His fine, short essays 'The Hovering of the Kestrel' and 'Birds Climbing the Air' indicate that Jefferies was clearly able to distinguish between the kestrel and sparrow hawk, and was cognizant of their different habits. What is equally evident is that 'hawks' were the subject of ceaseless persecution in the nineteenth century, and that there was a 'wanton destruction' of these birds.

It is evident from Jefferies writings that birds were an important item of diet, as well as commonly used as house pets, during the nineteenth century. Jefferies thus offers some interesting reflections on the activities of the moochers, or of the professional bird catchers, for there was a lively informal commerce between the town and

country focussed around birds. Almost all birds were eaten, particularly by the labouring poor, and in *Bevis Jefferies* records woodpigeons, dabchicks, moorhen, thrush and heron all being cooked and eaten, either by the boys themselves or taken by the cottage girl Loo to her family.

The birds mainly trapped for pets were the finches, especially the goldfinch, bullfinch, greenfinch and linnet. This trade undoubtedly flourished during the nineteenth century, and *Jefferies* records one shop in Westminster employing three bird-catchers during the season. Birds like the wheatear, starling and skylarks were mainly trapped, using nets or snares, for the table, while the finches were mainly kept as pets – as colourful songsters. Male bullfinches were greatly esteemed, and priced at around eight shillings a dozen.

Interestingly, *Jefferies* makes no mention of the hawfinch, or of such winter migrants as the siskin, brambling, redpoll and twite. But *Jefferies* does make some interesting general observations on the habits and ecology of birds – that during the winter months finches and sparrows congregate in extraordinary numbers around rickyards; that hedgerows form a major highway for birds, who often form mixed flocks. Birds, *Jefferies* writes, are ‘cosmopolitan’, and that birds act from custom rather than simply for survival and advantage. *Jefferies* also emphasizes the close association between birds and other animals, noting that sheep invariably have their contingent of magpies, starlings and wagtails.

In an interesting discussion on *Jefferies* and birds, W.J. Keith (in *Richard Jefferies Society Journal* 2001) emphasizes the limitations of *Jefferies* as a scientific naturalist; his continual use of generic terms, his failure to recognize such birds as the wood warbler, woodlark, and lesser whitethroat – which is forgivable given the fact that *Jefferies* did not possess any bird book to assist identification and that the science of ornithology was only then just emerging; and the fact that *Jefferies* makes no mention at all of hawfinch, corn bunting, quail, tree sparrow, coal tit, woodlark and some of the warblers. For these birds probably occurred, if only occasionally, in the neighbourhood of Coate during *Jefferies*’ time. Keith thus argues that *Jefferies*’ knowledge of birds was essentially that of a countryman, even if a particularly observant one, and that much of it was probably acquired informally through his associations with such people as the local gamekeeper. There seems no evidence that *Jefferies* engaged in the academic study of bird anatomy or bird behaviour, or to have made a special study of ornithology.

Thus Keith concludes rather negatively that *Jefferies* was never a

systematic scientific naturalist and that his knowledge of birds was not particularly remarkable – and that he had gaps of knowledge that might well embarrass an ‘expert birder’ of the present day. It seems hardly fair to criticize Jefferies for not being what he never claimed to be – a scientific biologist or ornithologist – and hardly helpful to rebuke him for not possessing the knowledge of biologists and bird-watchers of a century later. But Keith affirms Jefferies’ standing as an accurate observer of wildlife and as a literary naturalist.

The incomparable James Fisher, whose classic text *Watching Birds* (1940) was an inspiration to me as a boy, offers a much more balanced assessment of Jefferies as a student of bird life. As a schoolboy himself, Fisher found Jefferies’ writings ‘incredibly inspiring’ and suggests that in terms of personal observations that Jefferies had a much wider knowledge of British birds than did W.H. Hudson. He also considered the latter’s book *British Birds* to be neither accurate nor comprehensive. In contrast Fisher suggests that Jefferies had a deep understanding of the data on bird life and offered a remarkable anticipation of present issues and thinking in ornithology. Additionally Jefferies was certainly ahead of the ideas of the conservation societies of his day, and his scholarship was ahead of that of Hudson. ‘I like Jefferies’ long, pouring paragraphs of clear and clean-watched ruralities very much indeed’, wrote Fisher, ‘Better these than Hudson’s cheerless vision of the earth’ (*The Shell Bird Book* 1966).

Sources of Protein for Rural People in Richard Jefferies' Day

Eric Jones

Richard Jefferies lived in a period when the food available underwent marked changes.¹ The Repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846-1849 had abolished the tariffs which inflated the price of bread, although the main impact of free trade was delayed until the 1870s. From then on it was easy to forget how high the relative price of food had been and what a large share of the income of ordinary people it had absorbed.

Before the large-scale import of food and improvements of distribution via better inland communications, even landowners had depended heavily on what they could gather on their own estates. The tidy, ornamental countryside we now see disguises this, as do the flower gardens that modern taste demands around mansions open to the public.² The National Trust's 'parallel ghostly country within the country', as A. A. Gill calls it, seems especially prone to this story-book type of reconstruction.³ In reality the rich planted fruit trees and vegetable gardens close to their houses. Orchards pressed close around the market towns but have gone now; they have been built over.

In medieval times landowners would have kept so-called intermediate goods, such as pigeons in dovecotes to provide eggs and squabs (young birds), and carp reared in moats or fish ponds close to home. Well before Jefferies' time, the improvement of agriculture was starting to release them from these concerns so that moats could be filled in or converted into ornamental ponds and rabbit warrens moved out of the parks. Amenity considerations could come to the fore. With his customary astuteness Jefferies records these changes in *Chronicles of the Hedges*, noting the number of abandoned moats and fish-stews about outlying hamlets and the disused rabbit warrens on poor soils along the downs of the southern counties.

Hunting and shooting had originally been of serious practical value

¹ This article was given as a talk to the Richard Jefferies Society's Study Day at Coate Museum, 27 July 2013. Much of the information cited here comes from my book, *Revealed Biodiversity: an economic history of the human impact* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, in press) and some of the remainder from the MS of a book on The Middle Ridgeway which Patrick Dillon and I are preparing.

² Tim Mowl, *Historic Gardens of Gloucestershire* (Stroud: Tempus, 2002).

³ A. A. Gill, *The Angry Island: Hunting the English* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2005), p. 212.

to the landowners. Venison, pheasants, partridges and duck supplied food quickly, whereas the much larger carcasses of livestock tended to go bad if hung for long. A major innovation that changed the equation was the icehouse, which extended the length of time meat could be stored. Unfortunately the histories of icehouses are like too many accounts of technology; their introduction and modes of construction are noted but their spread is not mapped and how much they were actually used at different periods is not detailed. Yet clearly icehouses were present on many landed estates during the eighteenth century.

The meat available to ordinary country people in Jefferies' time was different in quality and quantity: it was neither abundant nor fresh. It involved eking out the backyard pig after slaughter for as long as possible, which meant it had to be smoked or salted. Twenty-five years after Jefferies' death, Alfred Williams reported that fresh meat, meaning butcher's meat, was still affordable only on Sundays.

Not long before, food had been so scarce that men had been driven to poaching and even sheep stealing. Carcasses were said to have been hidden in hollow trees and table-top tombs, for instance at Wanborough and South Cerney. Man traps, spring guns and transportation to Australia were employed to repress this desperate activity. Although the worst savagery had faded by Jefferies' youth, magistrates still heard cases of poaching on their own estates and there was repression enough until at least the First World War.

The problem was that, as Victorian landowners ceased to have to rely on local sources of fresh meat for themselves they became obsessed with the 'battue', the shooting of pheasants driven over the guns by beaters. The late Victorian period was known as the 'Age of the Pheasant'. Estates began to have the birds reared in huge pens and, right until 1914, increased the number of gamekeepers they employed. Much land was permitted to tumble out of grain production but instead of becoming open to all, access was still restricted and competing wildlife was killed off. W. H. Hudson called this the 'Curse of the Pheasant.'

Once landowners were able to buy in whatever meat they desired – as railways were built and improved the distribution of food for all who could afford it – some items that had been socially acceptable fell in status. They became food for the poor – if the poor were lucky. Rabbits were a prominent example. For centuries they had been preserved in warrens, for example at Mildenhall near Marlborough and at Aldbourne. They had been raised for their fur or were taken to the London meat markets by road waggon. The grass of the downs was mainly reserved for the sheep flocks; in consequence rabbit numbers

did not make much headway and historically were not large. According to that assiduous though perhaps fanciful statistician of the 1690s, Gregory King, the rabbit population was then only one-eleventh as large as the national sheep flock.

But by the Napoleonic wars, a period Richard Jefferies took care to quiz the old folks about, even the thin soils of the downs were being ploughed and turned from grass into arable land. Aldbourne warren was one place that succumbed. Altogether the number of warrens and the total population of rabbits both shrank. Rabbits soon recovered from the slaughter when the warrens were destroyed, however, because some escaped into the countryside. They harboured in the remaining unploughed areas and along the hedgerows of enclosed fields. They fed on the fodder crops sown for livestock feed as courses in arable rotations and were therefore beneficiaries of agricultural improvement, though they also managed well enough on unimproved herbage. Parts of the New Forest were already overrun by them at the start of the nineteenth century.⁴ Generally, wild rabbits may have become more numerous by mid-century than the warren population a hundred years earlier. The Ground Game Act of 1880 permitted farmers to take rabbits and, more to the point, they were gamekeepers' perks. Hence they were often preserved, and this, together with the continued privatisation of the countryside under the estate system, meant that the poor had limited access to them. Rural families may have lived on rabbits during the depression between the wars of the twentieth century but this does not mean they typically did so in Jefferies' day.

The poor were even more rigorously excluded from the rivers than from the land, and hence prevented from catching fish. Southern streams had been privatised for fly-fishing. When arable farming fell into depression during the 1880s, landowners built shooting lodges to let to London sportsmen, as Jefferies noted. The income went a little way to offset declining farm rents. Fishing lodges were built too. Some landowners had already been selling surplus fish on the London market, for instance trout and crayfish from the Kennet at Littlecote. The craze for fly-fishing had a considerable ecological impact, meaning that other species of fish and wildlife were rigorously pruned, as Jefferies shows in his essay, 'The Sacrifice to Trout.' The recourse of the more adventurous poor was fish-poaching, methods of which were described by Jefferies in *The Gamekeeper at Home*. But this can have provided only a surreptitious treat for a few families and did little to

⁴ E. W. Brayley and J. Britton, *The Beauties of England and Wales, VI: Hampshire* (London: Vernor and Hood *et al.*, 1805), p. 171.

supply fish protein in the average diet.

Already in the year 1846 the great fish market of Billingsgate sold an extraordinarily precise 500 million oysters, one billion fresh herrings, almost 100 million soles, 498 million shrimps, 303 million periwinkles, 33 million plaice, and 23 million mackerel.⁵ But little enough of this was reaching the Wiltshire rustic and would not do so for a long time, if ever. Sea-fish, often rather stale, stood in for fresh water fish in the villages of Jefferies' England. W. L. Barker wrote about fish in 1867, that 'many... from its high price and scarcity, are at present unable to obtain it.'⁶

Alternative sources of protein for the poor have nowadays gone out of fashion. They included wild birds' eggs. Few eggs were nevertheless large enough, palatable enough and conveniently produced by colonial nesters to make the effort of gathering them worthwhile. The lapwing is an exception, since, while it does not strictly breed in colonies, nests could be quite close together and the numbers used to be immense by modern standards. The eggs were sought for sale to hotels. Jefferies' near contemporary, A. C. Smith (author of *The Birds of Wiltshire*), claimed there was no regular trade in Wiltshire but local hotels were certainly supplied and he noted forty nests destroyed by farm implements within one week on a single patch of rough ground on the edge of Salisbury Plain. In north-west Hampshire, George Dewar described the late nineteenth-century egg-gatherer, 'walking up and down the favourite laying-places in April, with his eyes fastened on the ground', seizing the eggs and marking any incomplete clutch, 'to return in due course and empty the nest.' Dewar had found twenty lapwings' nests emptied in a field of two or three acres. As is often, perhaps usually, the case with anecdotes like this, their representativeness is unknown. Dewar may have chanced across a greedy individual with no thought for the morrow. But it is obvious that large numbers of eggs were taken. How many of them ended on the cottage breakfast table is another matter.

In some districts country people put bags at badger setts at night and used dogs to drive the animals so that they rushed into them. Feasts of pies made from badger hams were held in certain villages. Ilsley, Compton, Beedon and Hampstead Norris, all a few miles east of Coate, were famous venues. There was pressure on badger numbers or Jefferies would hardly have made the point that they survived best when their setts were located in (protected) parkland. Alfred Williams

⁵ Bill Bryson, *At Home: A Short History of Private Life* (London: Black Swan edition, 2011), pp. 132-133.

⁶ W. L. Barker, 'On Fish Culture', *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine* XI (1869), pp. 255-256.

states that badger hams were great delicacies but implies they were an old-fashioned taste by the start of the twentieth century. Yet badger fat was still used as ointment and it seems unlikely that the remainder of the animal was discarded; indeed badger feasts continued in places until at least the Second World War.

What else was there in the countryside for the poor? Not much is the answer. They were permitted to eat 'vermin pie', made from species their superiors did not want and were glad to see killed off. From the farmers' point of view this was pest control for free. Men and boys trapped 'vermin' as best they might and did so out of working hours. They went along the hedgerows at night scaring house sparrows and other birds into nets.

'Rook pie' was one product of killing so-called pests. In *Wild Life in a Southern County* Jefferies discusses the shooting of rooks in their rookeries. He points out that the young are not fit to cook until they are just ready to fly. Poachers would sneak in immediately before the rook-shoot and spoil the sport: young labourers climbed the elm trees to get at the nests, which was risky given that rooks nest among the twigs and outer branches. Interestingly, Jefferies says that this was done much less than before, which may be a tiny indication that diets were improving during the 1870s (*Wild Life* was published in 1879). The habits of people who had lived through even harder times were perhaps slower to change and landowners did not like to see an old labouring man with a gun because he was likely to shoot rooks at any time of year.

The activities mentioned were perhaps rather marginal. Obtaining meat of any kind in a landscape of preserved estates was a hardscrabble affair. Arable farming was going into decline in Jefferies' final years, village populations and farm employment were on the decline, and improved transport and communications were opening unheard-of culinary avenues for city dwellers. Poor farm labourers and their scrapings from the countryside were becoming anachronisms. We can tell this by comparing 'vermin pie' with London's consumption and redistributive trade in game birds. Londoners could pay better and attracted to themselves foodstuffs that did not appear on cottage tables for another century, if then.

The variety absorbed by Leadenhall, the chief market for game, was enormous. According to an article in the *Leisure Hour* in 1889, the 'offer', as retailers call it, included:

game innumerable, all hanging dead in plumes; and venison, skinned and unskinned, such as this market distributes in London alone to the tune of 350 tons a year. Where does the game come from? Scandinavia

and Russia, Germany and Italy, Manitoba and Wisconsin all contribute. Even 'the quails of the desert' come to Leadenhall. The grouse come from Yorkshire and the Highlands of Scotland; the pheasants and partridges from Norfolk and Suffolk; the teal, the widgeon, and the wild fowl from Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire and the lowlands of Holland.'

Of Leadenhall it was also reported that:

a well-known salesman estimated that there are supplied in one year 100,000 grouse, 125,000 partridges, 70,000 pheasants, 80,000 snipe, 150,000 Irish plover, 30,000 Egyptian quail, 70,000 widgeon, 30,000 teal, 200,000 wild duck, 150,000 small wild birds, and 400,000 larks. And to this he added 400,000 pigeons, mostly from France; 100,000 geese, mostly from Holland; 350,000 ducks, a good many from Buckinghamshire; 104,000 turkeys, mostly from East Anglia; 100,000 hares, 1,300,000 rabbits, and 2,000,000 domestic fowls, mostly from Surrey and Sussex.

The numbers are not to be taken as gospel truth, for the author of the article admitted that, 'Leadenhall likes not statistics'. Even so the throughput of the market was undoubtedly prodigious.

The 'offer' also comprised numbers of other species, 'all tempting the amateur as ornaments for the back yard, and all meaning roast or boiled in the immediate future'. In other words they were bought live and fattened for the table at home. The miscellany of 'unprofitable pets' were described as miserably huddled together but at least not destined to be eaten. They were 'hawks and canaries, larks and linnets, parrots and owls, hedgehogs, goldfish, foxes, water snails for the aquarium.' These were sold to townfolk. Country people took some wild creatures as pets but seem to have sold more to itinerant dealers, like the old man from Cheltenham who toured the villages in the Vale of White Horse every year in the 1880s and 1890s to buy linnets. The craft of trapping linnets and goldfinches for the trade is fully described in Jefferies' essay, 'The Professional Bird Catcher,' in *Chronicles of the Hedges*. Catching skylarks for the table, using nooses set in the stubble fields was, he says, a separate occupation.

Richard Jefferies said that the people of his time were healthier than the previous generation. This was presumably in part a reflection of better or at any rate more varied diets and above all of cheaper food. In turn it was the result of Free Trade, which encouraged grain imports and brought down the price of bread. This did not happen all at once; no vast supply of food was available from overseas at first, nor was there sufficient shipping capacity. But as the prairies, outback and pampas were increasingly brought under cultivation, supplies grew. Steam ships and railways improved both international commerce and

distribution within Britain. Late in Jefferies' life, refrigeration began to make imported meat more widely available. Alfred Williams refers to the consumption of Canadian bacon and cheese and to imported meat being sold from vans that came round the villages – a change barely evident in Jefferies' time.

Estate workers, including those in the great houses, were the exceptions who sometimes ate well. The crumbs from their employers' tables could be lavish. Other country people had to pick up whatever scraps of protein were left to them by the landowner's monopoly of the land and craze for shooting partridges and pheasants. Nevertheless trade was on the brink of bringing food prices down and was starting a true transformation of the cottager's diet.

The price of flour 1788

There has been a considerable amount of work undertaken on cereal prices. A standard source (Mitchell and Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics*), gives the following prices for wheat per shilling per Winchester quarter in the following years:

	<u>1786</u>	<u>1787</u>	<u>1788</u>	<u>1789</u>
Eton College:	38	46	47	51
Winchester College:	39	47	48	57

William Jefferies' letter (reproduced below) to his brother Richard (the writer's great grandfather), miller and baker, had spotted the upward trend in flour prices. The letter is dated 21st December 1788 and was purchased by the Richard Jefferies Society on 12th December 2013 from the late Hugoe Matthews' collection.

Dear Brother Thos comes to let you know about the price of Flower (*sic*) at the present Inst. Yesterday I spoke with M^r. Coxter about some and he said he could not sell them under 33/- per sack in the place, and said it would cost 7/6 a Bag Carriage Down to Swindon and that the Flower is Dearer at Newbury then it is Between Marlborough and Hungerford. He said if this dry weather should continue there would be no getting flower at Any price. Yesterday I spoke with M^r. Atherton and he said he should bring you a load of flower Wednesday next and his Waggon would pass by your Door on Tuesday. If you should be out of flower you might take out three or four sacks.

N.B. Be sure to advance your Goods soon Enough.

From Your Loving Brother W^m. Jefferies

Draycott

Sunday Morn Dec^r 21. 1788.

Jefferies' letter to his mother

A poignant and moving letter, written a year and a half before Richard Jefferies' death, and one of only two known letters written to his mother.

The Downs
[Crowborough]
Feb 8th [1886]

My dear Mother,

I have wanted for a long time to write to you but I am so fearfully weak I can with difficulty sit & the torture I go through every day & often all night long is indescribable, my stomach and bowels seem all wasted away & my back is as it were broken, nothing will give any relief. It starves me – it is downright starvation, eat what I will it is still empty. There is something wrong inside the belly which no one can find out. The doctor here says he has no idea what is the matter & has given me up sometime. I am now trying to get a physician down from London but the expense is very great. The cold here is intense & does so much harm but cold is not the cause of the disease. I am so sorry to hear that you have been ill with gout in the stomach which is a most painful thing I should think. I could not write then for I could not sit up at all. I have not heard how the governor is for a long time I do hope you are both better. You must not be surprised that Jessie has not written. She has so much to do waiting on me all day for I cannot do the smallest thing for myself. So you must not suppose it is because we do not think of you. Phyllis has grown such a big girl & is very busy & happy, she knows her letters now. Toby is all go & much like a wild March wind. He plays at hare & hounds right through the forest here, sometimes they go for miles & rather alarm me as I cannot get out to see what he is doing. I have not been out of doors now for months. He often talks of his grandfather & wants to see him. I hope we shall see you both in the warmer weather. Phyllis says I am to tell you something about her, she says she can do some sewing now. Toby gets on capital with his drawing at the studio & will I think make a first-rate draughtsman if he will but work. He has taught himself several airs on the piano entirely by ear & sings very nicely having a good voice. I very much hope that you & the governor will come and see us in the warmer weather. This place is beautiful in summer. Now it is a howling wilderness. I have managed to write a letter somehow but it causes me such distress & pain to do anything.

With much love to yourself & the governor always your affectionate son, Richard.

Jefferies praises Besant

Andrew Rossabi

A recent rereading of Jefferies' powerful essay 'Walks in the Wheat-fields' and of Kedrun Laurie's excellent article 'Who read Richard Jefferies? – the evidence of the North fund subscription list' [1] revealed a serious omission in my article 'His First Biographer'. [2] I should have mentioned that in the essay Jefferies referred to and praised Besant's novel *The Children of Gibeon*, as pointed out by Laurie.

The first part of 'Walks in the Wheat-fields' is an impassioned meditation on the place of wheat in human life. The 'walks' of the title refer as much to the movements of Jefferies' discursive mind as to any physical walks. Mingling memory with reflection, the essay opens with a close-up of a single grain of wheat, which Jefferies variously compares to a miniature human wrapped in a garment, an Arctic explorer rolled in his sleeping-bag, and an Egyptian mummy shrouded in yards of linen. He considers the economic value of wheat, the way it rules the world as source of the staff of life, the golden wheat as real, visible, tangible wealth. This leads him to recall particular wheat-fields in winter and summer, including one unlocated but clearly at Draycot Foliat, from where his paternal forbears came. Another is a mile long: Jefferies describes the host of animals, birds and insects that live in it, then pictures the field invaded by the reapers at harvest time, their skins blackened by the August sun. He contrasts the beauty of the wheat ('which I strive in vain to tell you' [3]) with the frenzied, almost demonic energy with which it was harvested. He evokes 'the endless length of wall and the enormous roof of a great tithe barn,' [4] at which he used to wonder as a boy, and likens it to the blank walls of a Spanish convent. He continues:

I have often thought that it would perhaps be a good thing if this contribution of the real tenth could be brought back again for another purpose. If such a barn could be filled now, and its produce applied to the help of the poor and aged and injured of the village, we might get rid of that blot on our civilization—the workhouse.[5]

He goes on:

Mr Besant, in his late capital story, *The Children of Gibeon*, most truly pointed out that it was custom which rendered all men indifferent to the sufferings of their fellow-creatures.[6]

Custom – 'cruel custom, that tyrant of the mind' [7] – has inured us

to the workhouse, which Jefferies calls a waiting-room to the grave.

Could we, then, see the tithe barn filled again with golden wheat for this purpose of help to humanity, it might be a great and wonderful good. With this tenth to feed the starving and clothe the naked; with the tenth to give the little children a midday meal at the school—that would be natural and true. In the course of time, as the land laws lessen their grip, and the people take possession of the earth on which they stand, it is more than probable that something of this kind will really come about. It would be only simple justice after so many centuries—it takes so many hundreds of years to get even that.[8]

Jefferies ends the first part of the essay with a wonderful picture of the flocks of birds that descend on the stubble after the reapers. Their sharp eyes detect grains that have escaped man's hand. To the birds

the wheat-field gives a constant dole like the monasteries of old, only here it is no crust, but a free and bountiful largess.[9]

* * *

The Children of Gibeon (1886), serialized in *Longman's Magazine* from January to December 1886 before publication in volume form[10], was one of Besant's two 'social conscience' novels set in London's East End. The other was the earlier (and hugely successful) *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* (1882). Both novels were inseparable from Besant's philanthropic work and raised uncomfortable questions about poverty amid affluence, about a Britain divided into two nations, rich and poor: questions as relevant now as then. *The Children of Gibeon* treated the evils of sweatshops and the sweating system, defined by *Chambers* as 'the practice of working poor people at starvation wages, for long hours, at home or in unhealthy rooms': in particular, the novel depicted the daily lives of the girls and young women who sewed in their lodgings, who made 'the buttonhole at the starvation wage of elevenpence halfpenny a gross'.[11] Besant said his novel 'perhaps corrected some abuses'.[12] According to the *Dictionary of National Biography* it helped forward the movement for the unionization of the women.[13]

In his essay Jefferies returned to an idea he had mooted earlier in *The Story of My Heart*: that of a granary to feed the poor. There he had declaimed against the fact that after twelve thousand years the human race still lived from hand to mouth, still had to labour for daily subsistence. He expressed astonishment that

In twelve thousand written years the world has not yet built itself a House, nor filled a Granary, nor organized itself for its own comfort.[14]

He believed the earth produced enough food 'for stores and granaries to be filled to the roof-tree for years ahead. I verily believe that the earth in one year produces enough food to last for thirty.' [15]

His tone towards the poor, infirm, oppressed and aged was now very different from that of the *Times* letters of 1872, though it should be stressed that in his early writings his animus was generally directed less against the labourer than against those whom he denoted by the perjorative term 'agitators': in other words, the union agents or representatives, who toured the villages and tried to recruit the labourers for Joseph Arch's union.

It is interesting to speculate how far Jefferies' reading of *The Children of Gibeon* may have helped intensify the sympathy with the poor and oppressed shown in his later work. He may also have read *All Sorts and Conditions of Men*, for he uses the phrase (which comes from 'A Collect or Prayer for all Conditions of men' in *The Book of Common Prayer* [16]) in the context of the election meeting at the end of *The Dewy Morn* [17].

[1] Kedrun Laurie, 'Who read Richard Jefferies? The evidence of the North fund subscription list,' *The Richard Jefferies Society Journal*, Number 18, 2009, pp.6-30.

[2] Andrew Rossabi, 'His First Biographer: a Profile of Sir Walter Besant', *The Richard Jefferies Society Journal*, Number 20, 2011, pp.26-39.

[3] Richard Jefferies, 'Walks in the Wheat-fields,' *Field and Hedgerow* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1895), p.133.

[4] *ibid.*, p.134.

[5] *ibid.*, p.135.

[6] *ibid.*

[7] *ibid.*, p.136.

[8] *ibid.*

[9] *ibid.*, p.138.

[10] Laurie, *op.cit.*, p.20.

[11] *Autobiography of Sir Walter Besant* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1902), p.249.

[12] *ibid.*

[13] *Dictionary of National Biography*, entry on Sir Walter Besant by 'W.B.O.', p.154.

[14] *The Story of My Heart* (Quartet Books, 1979), p.119.

[15] *ibid.* The prodigality, the open-handedness, the exceeding plenty of nature was a favourite theme of Jefferies, who argued from it that there was no physical reason why everyone should not have at least the bare necessities of

life. See for example the two paragraphs in 'Meadow Thoughts' (in *The Life of the Fields*) beginning 'The little lawn beside the strawberry bed'.

[16] I was alerted to this fact by W.J. Keith's valuable notes on the novel. The prayer ends: 'Finally, we commend to thy fatherly goodness all those, who are any ways afflicted, or distressed, in mind, body, or estate; that it may please thee to comfort and relieve them, according to their several necessities, giving them patience under their sufferings, and a happy issue out of all their afflictions. And this we beg for Jesus Christ his sake. Amen.'

[17] *The Dewy Morn*, Chapter XLVII, p.334, in the one-volume second edition published by Macmillan.



Walter Besant (1836-1901)

'The Man in the Tumulus'

J. B. Jones

This article was published in the Herald and Advertiser on 17 July 1942.

* * *

There were grass-grown tumuli on the hills to which of old I used to walk, sit down at the foot of one of them, and think. Some warrior had been interred there in the ante-historic times. (*The Story of My Heart*, ch. III).

The only tumulus on Liddington Hill to which this can apply is described by Mr. A. D. Passmore in the Wilts Archaeological Magazine for 1940, thus: —

Exactly one mile slightly east of south from Liddington Castle is a small low mutilated round barrow, still about two feet high, with a shallow ditch . . . Possibly in Roman days the mound was opened by a trench; this reached the grave and the urn and bones were taken out, broken up, and scattered over a large area. Then the barrow was trenched in all directions . . . The diameter of the barrow is 43 feet.

Mr. L. V. Grinsell in a paper, entitled 'The Archaeological Contributions of Richard Jefferies,' a reprint from the Transactions of the Newbury District Field Club, 1940, says: —

It would be interesting to determine with certainty which tumulus inspired Jefferies to write of in *The Story of My Heart*. It was evidently one very near to Liddington Castle. The little mound immediately south of the castle is almost certainly not one. It looks like a pillow mound and is opposite a break in the vallum. Jefferies would not have taken that for a tumulus.

The nearest barrows are a small bowl-barrow a mile south of the camp, and a large bowl-barrow a mile south-east thereof. The former was most likely where Jefferies sat and meditated.

Jefferies lacked the instinct for sociability, and had hardly any friends. It has been said that, apart from his wife, the only person he ever befriended was 'the man in the tumulus.'

Jefferies' Real Meaning

It is fortunate that we have the same barrow described by two first-rate antiquarian authorities, but the assumption that 'the tumulus was evidently one very near to Liddington Castle' is, it is here and now suggested, based on a misconception of Jefferies' language. To get his real meaning it will be necessary to read the paragraph, quoted from

The Story of My Heart, thus:—

There were grass-grown tumuli on the hills to which I used to walk, sit down at the foot of any one of them, and think.

This does not exclude Liddington nor is it maintained that it should, but a wider field is allowed. It gives access to Barbury, an alternative site for the tumulus. In his *Wild Life in a Southern County* Jefferies refers to certain topographical features, with precision for a wanderer, when describing the Ridge Way to Burderop:—

Nearby (in Gipsy Lane) is an ancient tumulus on which grows a small yet obviously aged sycamore, stunted by wind and storm, and under it the holes of rabbits, drilling their habitations into the tomb of the unknown warrior . . . Above on the summit is another ancient camp (Barbury), and below two more turf-grown tumuli, low and shaped like an inverted bowl.

Either of the two last-mentioned tombs would provide a suitable location for the 'man in the tumulus.' The Gipsy Lane barrow, still sycamore-crowned in 1941, is ruled in the discussion topographically, just as, for a similar reason, is Mr. Grinsell's 'large bowl-barrow, south-east of Liddington Castle.'

A Dual Application

The following quotation from *The Story of My Heart* will apply to both Liddington and Barbury. As to place-identification, one must always bear in mind Jefferies' Turneresque method as artist, and also that, following his long exile from his native Wilts downland, memories of the homeland must have melted somewhat into one another:—

Sweetly the summer air came up to the tumulus . . . The azure morning had spread its arms over the low tomb . . . Brown autumn dwelt in the woods beneath [either Hodson Woods; or those in the Chiseldon—Ogbourne indent]; the rime of winter whitened the beech-clump on the ridge [there, are beech-clumps on both Liddington and Barbury]; again the buds came on the wind-blown hawthorn bushes (these grow on both hills, but are much commoner on Barbury) . . . The Wind sighs through the grass, sighs in the sunshine; it has drifted the butterfly eastwards along the hill [Liddington Hill by the tumulus runs north and south; the east to west front of Barbury suits the term eastwards exactly]; a few yards away there lies the skull of a lamb picked clean long since by crows and ants.

One may sometimes see on Barbury a crow-trap baited with a dead lamb, and have Jefferies' words recalled with startling vividness. Not evidence for Barbury of course, but the hill is a much lonelier spot than Liddington and a likely place for such a find.

The Artist's Licence

A more important passage is from *Round About a Great Estate* as the places there mentioned can be recognised with certainty. From the lofty, mutilated tumulus of Liddington, Jefferies looked south-westwardly over a 'broad plain, beautiful with wheat,' from the less loftily situated, but shapely, tumuli beneath the recently erected Barbury Stone, he could survey to the north a still broader plain (that of Draycot—Overtown), at its extreme boundary a wood (Hodson), and beyond that the horizon lost in the summer haze (over the Cotswolds). It was one vast expanse of cereals, nothing but yellowing wheat beneath the ramparts of the hills around (Barbury—Burderop).

To one familiar with the localities in question there comes the deepening suspicion, when all is seen and said, our man in the tumulus does not sleep either at Liddington or at Barbury. But Jefferies' 'man in the tumulus' is a figment of genius, and can be accommodated at option in either bed. Shall we say that R.J., a great artist, and using the licence of one, has redesigned the battered Liddington tumulus by 'lifting' a well-favoured barrow; from the Barbury site he knew well, and planting it, at the time he wrote *The Story of My Heart*, upon the hills which look down upon Coate? Why not? In that delightful last chapter of *Wood Magic* we learn, what assuredly no archaeologist has ever noted, that a grand circle of big sarsens stands by Liddington Castle close to 'a little round hill (which) greatly pleased Bevis, who would have liked to carry it to his garden at home.' As to the stones, they were so large that 'he (Bevis) peered under and climbed over one or two and discovered that they were put in a circle.'

Book Review

Roger Ebbatson. *Landscape and Literature 1830-1914: Nature, Text, Aura*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. 221pp.

Roger Ebbatson will be a well-known name to many readers of this journal: his previous work has already played a significant role in recuperating Richard Jefferies as a writer worthy of serious critical and theoretical attention. *Landscape and Literature* builds on this earlier body of research, in particular *An Imaginary England: Nation, Landscape and Literature 1840-1920* (Ashgate, 2005) and *Heidegger's Bicycle: Interfering with Victorian Texts* (Sussex Academic Press, 2006). One of the major strengths of all three books is to bring Jefferies back into suggestive dialogue with more critically fêted nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writers. In *Landscape and Literature*, Jefferies finds himself in the company of much-discussed figures including Thomas Hardy, John Ruskin, Alfred Lord Tennyson and Edward Thomas, as well as those traditionally deemed more marginal (Alfred Tennyson's brother Charles Tennyson Turner, George Borrow, W. H. Hudson). The book is characterized by intelligent and often arresting juxtapositions, which serve to illuminate canonical writers in new ways, as well as offering fresh insights into Jefferies' fiction and lesser-known essays.

Q. D. Leavis applauded Jefferies as 'one of those comprehensive geniuses from whose work you can take whatever you are inclined to find'.¹ Ebbatson is no Leavisite, but a Jefferies who is unusually open to multiple readings and diverse theoretical and philosophical approaches emerges from his study. Ebbatson seeks to tease out textual gaps, inconsistencies and indeterminacy in the work of all the writers under discussion – a practice that reveals debts to deconstruction as well as the other theoretical perspectives that take centre-stage here, such as the Frankfurt School Marxism and aesthetic theory of Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin, and the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Martin Heidegger. The result is a thought-provoking read with much to say about Jefferies (and others) as ambivalent chroniclers of landscape, Englishness and modernity.

The book is divided into three parts. 'Tennysonian', which focuses on Alfred Lord Tennyson, Arthur Hallam and Charles Tennyson

¹ Leavis, Q. D. "Lives and Works of Richard Jefferies". *A Selection from Scrutiny*. Vol II. Ed. F. R. Leavis. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1968, pp. 202–10.

Turner, is indebted to Adorno's reflections on the place of lyric poetry in modernity, arguing for the lyric as a historically and socially embedded art form. The discussion of Tennyson takes in Chartism, astronomy, and the place of dialect poetry in the context of class and nationalism (the latter explored through an inventive and subtle take on Tennyson's linguistic experiments in late poems such as 'Northern Farmer, Old Style'). Ebbatson concludes part one with a discussion of Tennyson Turner's take on the eruption of industry in the rural landscape through analysis of his sonnet 'The Steam-Threshing Machine', which he argues evokes 'ambivalence towards the machine age, the potency of enlightenment reason and the concomitant despoliation of nature' (p. 72). This section, in particular, serves as a bridge to the late Victorian prose texts of part two: here Ebbatson returns to 'ecological ambivalence' (p. 117) about the steam threshing machine as a symbol of technological modernity in Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and Jefferies' essays 'Unequal Agriculture' (1877) and 'The Power of the Farmers' (1874). This section also offers much rich material on 'prophetic landscapes' in Ruskin, Hardy and Jefferies: here, both Benjamin and Heidegger provide theoretical ballast for reflections on the ways landscape writing becomes entwined with an 'existential "homelessness"' in the period (p. 137). The final section, 'The South Country', offers engaging and astute material on the meaning of key cultural referents – from Stonehenge and gypsies – in the formation of Englishness in the period from 1850 to 1914, before concluding with a Heideggerian analysis of the poetry of Edward Thomas. Writing 'within the shadow of war' (p. 185), Ebbatson suggests, indelibly marks the mental landscape of both philosopher and poet.

Such a brisk sequential summary, however, perhaps cuts against the spirit of the book. Ebbatson's intentions are clear from the start: as he notes, *Landscape and Literature* adopts a circular rather than a 'historicist linear' argument, seeking to 'replace the stability of authorial intention by a galaxy of interwoven symbols and repeated patterns of figuration' (p. 6). Those symbols are often surprisingly suggestive. There is a lively discussion of the metaphorical significance of the swamp or mire that links Jefferies' iconic exploration of the putrid swamp that was once the metropolis in *After London to Far from the Madding Crowd*, *Pilgrim's Progress*, Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and the social commentary of C. F. G. Masterman. While Ebbatson draws on the psychoanalytic approaches of Rod Giblett, his own discussion of the nineteenth-century anthropologist Bachofen, who linked the swamp with an early period of sexual

anarchy that he believed preceded matriarchal and patriarchal stages of human development, is original and persuasive, offering thoughtful ways of reading Bathsheba's nocturnal retreat into the noxious swamp regions after discovering the body of Fanny Robin's baby (and therefore Troy's infidelity) in *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Here, it is possible to see how landscape and sexuality became linked in potent ways in pre- (as well as post-) Freudian contexts.

'Benjamin, Proust and Ruskin think in images and seek to resist the nineteenth-century dogma of historical progress', writes Ebbatson (p. 153) and his own book might also be seen to unfold in a similar manner, structuring its arguments around a powerful series of images that are used to link nineteenth- and twentieth-century theorists, poets and writers. Ruskin's fascination with urban detritus – the 'ashes and rags, beer-bottles and old shoes' which stand as an image of modern life in *Fiction, Fair and Foul* (cited in Ebbatson, p. 142) becomes incorporated into a broader narrative concerning modernity and the technological disruption of nature that is seen to reach its apotheosis in the "slimescape" of the Western front' (p. 150). Although the latter is not directly referenced here, Ebbatson's argument might encourage us to think about links between Ruskin and T. S. Eliot, and the image of the desecrated Thames in one of the most famous works of post war modernism, 'The Waste Land', where 'the river sweats / Oil and tar' and is linked in memory to 'empty bottles, sandwich papers' and 'cigarette ends'.

Ruskin's language, in Ebbatson's striking phrase, registers a 'melancholy pathology of shock' (p. 145): it is not just Ruskin, but Hardy and Jefferies who are seen as figures who anticipate the alienated sensibility of the early twentieth-century modern. In an intelligent discussion of the 'polarity between epiphanic and blasted landscapes' in Jefferies' *The Story of My Heart* and *After London* and Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 'pre echoes' of that culminating moment of war also seem apparent (p. 126). To see Victorian texts as prophetically anticipating the human and technological devastation of World War One – as 'staging a process of mobility and exile which will culminate in the Western Front' (p. 8) – might cut against the claim to dispense with a linear historical narrative made at the outset, but it produces some fine analysis, including a meditation on the place of the South Country – and Salisbury Plain in particular – in pre- and post-war literature and myth. Ebbatson comes into his own when reflecting on the way the regional becomes a powerful force in the formation of a distinctive kind of Englishness in this period. There is a particularly effective discussion of Hardy and Stonehenge, which links

the significance of this ancient space in the tragic conclusion of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* to the site's subsequent incorporation into a militarized landscape in Hardy's 1914 poem 'Channel Firing'. The chapter takes in a revealing and unexpected range of figures (W. H. Hudson and V. S Naipal amongst them) along the way.

The relationship between landscape evocation and a romantic nationalism would prove critical in the nineteenth century', Ebbatson writes at the outset of the study (p. 2), and there is a short but valuable reflection on the potentially reactionary nature of transcendental writing rooted in the land, in which Jefferies' *The Story of My Heart* and Heidegger's theoretical works are both discussed. This raises many questions that might be worthy of further analysis: how exactly *do* we read Jefferies mysticism in *The Story of My Heart* in political terms? Jefferies may have claimed in his notebooks to 'take no interest in politics', but in Ebbatson's account texts reveal a political unconscious irrespective of authorial intention.² The anti-democratic tendencies in some of Jefferies' writings are only touched on here, but ambiguities and tensions in his works are never far from the surface. While its theoretical orientation may not always appeal to biographically minded critics, *Landscape and Literature* is full of erudite and engaging material, with many thought-provoking asides, any number of which could be developed further. The book's 'constellation' structure (as Ebbatson terms it) means it can also be read effectively as a series of discrete essays, dipped into and returned to. If Jefferies remains an enigmatic figure at the end of this study, *Landscape and Literature* makes a sound case for his status as a writer whose conflicted relationship with the landscape is distinctly modern, and whose works deserve reappraising and rereading in that light.

Caroline Sumpter

² Richard Jefferies, *The Notebooks of Richard Jefferies*. Ed. Samuel J. Looker. London: Grey Walls Press, 1948, pp. 142.

Errata – *Journal* No 23 (Summer 2012)

p.27 lines 27-8 should read: 'Then living at Crowborough'.

p.29 line 2 should read 'that gives the corn its power over me'.

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