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# Selections from Richard Jefferies' 1876 Notebook

*John Pearson*

The first part of John Pearson's transcription of the 1876 notebook appeared in Number 13 of *the Journal* (2004). It began in early May 1876. The second instalment follows here: it probably covers June and the beginning of July, and shows Jefferies thinking out novels and articles, and publishers to whom he might offer them.

The original notebook, mostly in shorthand, is in the British Library (BL Add. Mss 58821), and this instalment is published with the permission of the Library, and that of Dr Pearson. A copy of the thesis, from which this transcription is taken, is in the Swindon Reference Library.

It has always been assumed that Jefferies spent these summer months of 1876 at the Sydenham house of his aunt Ellen Harrild, while Jessie remained in Swindon with their baby son Harold.

## Notebook for 1876 - Part II

Folio 53

Wilcox - ask his advice about Derby Day and description generally? Also introduction to novels? Wine?

H. Hide [Hyde] . . . half past four: will he speak to Mr Dicks? Does he know MacDougall? Is MacDougall any good at the House of Commons? Does he know me???

Folio 52

Then will send the piece to the *Daily News*?

First for the *Times*.

Second for the *Daily News*.

Third for the *Standard*.

Fourth for the *Daily Telegraph*.

We have book two - *Standard*, then in the *World*. Ask for return.

1st - Academy - write account of it by end: skeleton and everything local...

Now about Tuesday's work.

The children at the Derby - bigger children. Trace up children for the *Daily News*'? The only children babies. Marvellous how they escape being injured in the crush.

Women betting and the great increase of it - under observation for the *Daily Telegraph*?

Stampede - *Daily Telegraph* - the Derby from the start to the

Folio 51

coming in - lady riding over people ...

One million rats - first complete novel in draft. Have one good write out through this. Which first - slips *Standard*?

Everything I see still was for one wretched being.

Last wrote to Bentley May 24th, Thursday.

Advertisement: insert in diary.

First - who can be.

Second - generally for a short interview and daily walk about Eltham if they will stay a short time up.

Third - get my scrap-book ready.

Myself - depend upon friends more than actually want - independent spirit wanted - must jump over London Bridge I must. Was driven to extreme. Alas,

1 want to be human in this shape ... thirty shillings per week.

Some small work every month to save me from utter despair. Put it almost as straight, even if I get a piece in about the Derby.

Ask payment for the piece immediately - he could not do this - manager.

*Daily News* - Labouchere.

.... books of the *World*.

*Jefferies' numbering of the folios ceases here; Dr Pearson supplies substitute pagination.*

Page 1

*Figaro* - size of.

Novel: study the writings of Charles Reade. Construction of French plays - the plot of the *Henriade*?

2 Albert Terrace, Knightsbridge. Thackeray's style.

C. Reade's system of notes. Write first in shorthand and then

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write in longhand. Re-write serially.

To build up like my ... was something.

A. Literary workmanship. First general ideas, novel in view, also general articles.

B. Agriculture and cuttings for articles.

C. Cuttings of scraps of useful knowledge.

D. Prehistoric, if I take that up. Index in report about, and Index of Indexes.

Page 3

Should begin the new novel at once and gradually build it till you can introduce them.

The client's work - 1500 would repay. The *World* must be followed up - significant -

most important of all. It may give me regular work for the time, and not only that, it

may give me the reputation which will give me better work still. Follow it up most

carefully.

Why not a succession of articles you all like - love in these modern days? Or upon character of women mentally - detail. Insert little words of woman to woman making a note of nerves.

The only novel that will ever take will be something *a la World* - make articles on it. Are details with that kind of thing significant - groundwork, and the rest a genuine but significant accessory.

Page 4

A great deal in the Socialism of the *World* articles for a novel - it must be something I can believe.

When I get a short story in the *New Monthly Magazine*, write to Ward Locks and ask them to give it notice?

Great deal in style alone - as Thackeray and Ouida.

Pay the reader - advertisements offering twenty-five pounds, our offer twenty-five.

If you get a reply recommend it to the public. No man can write a good novel except he could write a good play.

... Important: 1. Examine book.

Important: 2. Political and government generally.

3. My book on the lies that have been told since the world began.

4. My plans of what had to be done not only with Europe, but with the whole world.

Series - could not put them up in one, but can begin to make notes for it. Separate small notebooks.

Page 5

If I were to offer some of my suggestions as to the conduct of magazines to Edmund Yates he would very likely say nothing. The silliness of magazines generally.

Suggest special correspondent touch the plays: see manuscript. Novel -

Oralyse [Analyse] like Shakespeare - so nothing shown to be scarcely in the scene, and yet all plain and convenient on the eye. Action.

Among other things forward these suggestions to Edmund Yates .. . essence of the world [*World*], Europe, best selections from GFA papers witty and amusing.

Drawing-room picture - this brought the idea up - the story idea. Ever so little money and then Stock Exchange, or something on the account...

The dictator to review.

Novello, Ewer and Co., 69-70 Dean St., Soho, and published at 125 Fleet Street.

I think it is conservative. One column, 1120 words - twelve to fourteen folios of copy.

*Hour* - MacDougall, proprietor.

#### Page 6

N. Must have an immense tale of human interest in the characters as in... This and socialism are the two lessons I learned in London . . . improvement urgently will secure success ... if published. Edmund Yates. Suggested a series of articles upon the same subject - this work would have to be ready for the early autumn.

Style - newspapers choice of a word - a polished style, yet simple Saxon words.

#### Page 7

Re-arrange at the same time with a good plot like play - with more dialogue -with plenty of socialism and with plenty of human interest in the heroine - a perfect living character drawn, a loving darling, full passionate girl - loved by own sex, even as in the Academy scene . . . take some parts from first novel manuscripts, "Only a Girl". Finished power of workmanship to come. N. One volume? Twenty-five subscribers? Latin quotation on title page -

- verses over each chapter.

N. Omit all that strikes me as superfluous, as a seal-shooting scene was superfluous in Shiela - as ghost in looking glass - as on Derby Day - as the Spiritualists - as the people, the bottle manufacturers - wants more plot: or more of the characters: less irrelevant matter. One column, do it well. Persons to pass comment: and even better, make suggestions. Make suggestions of our own.

#### Page 8

N. Work out a complete book - names, each incident, just by writing it. A good deal of eclecticism - ruthless excision, even of that which pleases some is ... Edmund Yates. Fallen Angels - Develops [Devil's] case of some of the early ones - as for girl driving in the park, a pin [pen] in hand.

XX - in original makes allowance for the multitude - it shows through everything they value.

Idea. That the characteristic of this age is the total absence of any *arcana* -nothing secret in the sense of mysterious. Honey mixed with hot spice ...

#### Page 9

Idea. The way of addressing people successfully and thoroughly is to believe in our own disposition at the time - requires versatility not consistency.

N. A rural play in action - *scenes actual*.

*Daily News* - good things ready behind it too - all things pointing are to a point. It must depend upon use in the long run and at all times.

N. A joint stock account theme - completely sketch out for the *New Quarterly*? Favourite?

Beauty - blind, like colour-blind - they could not appreciate ...

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Ransomes, Sims and Head. Ipswich agricultural implement factory employs 1,200 men.

Edmund Yates. Social Paupers - analysis of society like London. Poor and work - rich paupers and those who should be helped, but are not, as governesses.

Lady Drivers - blue dress, black.

To ... My idea of writing descriptive article - painting a picture - not mere reading, but so they can see it.

2. Augment his letter [this later]: the Socratic to continue from their own minds.

3. Report. To select the most striking and important features.

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Human beings enjoy all - what is to us should be compared to a wave approaching the shore - you could do things which will give pleasure, but we think it will be the Sunday, quiet pleasure like a shingly beach, or we think it will be dashed into a thousand atoms against precipitous rocks ...

"A most acute juvenile." - Shakespeare.

"The lounging classes." - Italian.

News of the Provinces reproduced in London, and from there read again in the country.

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"and to be sadly in view and have that feeling, lay even money against one horse and three to one against each of two others - the field lays them for nothing."

July 1st. V.R. Hyde Park.

Mr Passmore Edwards, proprietor, *Echo*. Via S.B. Besika Bay ... *Daily News* - missed June 12th, Monday. 1. Read.

2. Missed 14th, Wednesday.

3. Missed 15th, Thursday. Read 16th, Friday. Missed 17th, Saturday.

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N. More workmanship than material. One folio - should I try the *Gentleman's Magazine* with it?

It is my own ideas, but with a *setting* - it is the setting - set next time. What's Tennyson's poems but setting. Strive no more for something absolutely novel. Take back with you the new style and a new setting, and then you will succeed.

This is later, Cambridge.

Hamlet - all killed - *well done*: it is the *setting* makes it a good play.

Page 14

N. Grotesque, sweet love and sadness - this is what Shakespeare did in his piece. To re-write on back side of sheet, then just copy out on large paper in good language - this rewriting twice - lively speaking, *each* sentence an epigram, or like the Marlborough folio.

To *Echo* - write the piece and send it through ...

To *Daily News*. Write and write and write the best of it over ten times over, but no speech.

N. Try Macmillan with it when re-written.

Theatres in trains.

All night, slept almost nothing.

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He oiling door. He looked at his pistols and put them back in his sash. Really speaking they were double-barrelled revolvers that carried sure death in their tubes.

Hyde Park Review - reverse what a certain poet - Dryden, or Milton - the Milton of his age:

"Hands without mouths maintained at small expense,

In peace a joy, in war a strong defence."

Coming Woman. "That not impossible she," meditating wistfully. The cavalier poet speculates upon that not impossible she, "Who shall control my heart and me", so the world society at this

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time must speculate on the future *she* as hinted at by ... and by divorces, and by women doctors etc., and the change in the tone of society. This flower-in-the-buttonhole age. Lounging with lorgnette, looks forward wistfully to the woman of the future.

"The Platform" - a good title for the new magazine or journal. Do tomorrow - one of these village life sketches for the *Graphic*, or if refused for straight review.

Joint Stock Companies - *Neiv Quarterly*.

Page 17

Letter - "Spirit of Modern Agriculture" - July title - to Crawford abroad.

"In Summer Time" - a rural story???

Details of which group will give exceptional money - get it. Therefore, it shows that joint stock is a good scheme, a thing wanted for all creditors. All the world's a snob - dress well

and they respect you.

Plot - social plot - the bigger the better and the characters split right up.

Socialism - all die, or many, and hunting, and dialogue.

N. 2. Force of little circumstances in modern life.

The greatest misery to a plotter is it *wanting*: dry rot on a nervous system.

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Place yourself upon a hill, the crowd and their passions noisy... all very real.

Ethics therefore above all.

In N. 2 - the twenty set characters.

They are too loud to do much harm, but there is a silent matter making progress to plant insidious poison, worse than all.

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A lovable woman in the nude.

The *Globe* - write a piece for them

Same for the *Daily News*. Also the *Echo*.

Sunday July 9th. Pour Retour - evolution one: my [C.W.L.] papers on the hills like the pages from things papyrus are like some I wrote for the history, but left out - and in these grass and flowers and sun and breeze, my joint religion and truth that I wish to write and publish - this at no cost: beautiful description and my own real art thoughts: as well as other things. The Dragon's Mount - visited.

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Levee. Theatres. Advertisements - see.

2. Letter to Corporation. *New Quarterly* - see before Joint Stock Farming, or see proposed list? Give two or three for choice.

3. Tell Hutton about working stock labour if I follow. G. A. Sala - leader, *London News*, for his advice and assistance then??

4. Dicks - come and see me about a novel at once. 5.... a regular rough one this time. Adventures are to the adventurous.

Offer to give Bentley the best of country dancing - ask if Crawford would take the articles for idea on men acting.

N. "In Summer Time" rewritten - picnic scene in Marlborough Forest among the brackens.

Edmund Yates. *Xerxes*. A new pleasure - the world would give any price, like Xerxes for a new pleasure, hence dull seeking tin do so well.



Capital in Agriculture the better title - see Joint Stock Farm.

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I will lend him a local history of exquisite charm, and make it a facet for writing.  
... extract from the dark tradition. Or Welsh ... because of Aneurin: man of the Britons  
... Silkworms eggs pupae ... from that Merlin under the stone.

The Sea Dragon's frond as per lady waving palm.

1001 nights at sea.

Suidomus - house by itself.

That is best - each life [nearest] - should be there with facts - afterwards in notes? Or rather in shape of commentary.

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I walked out in the country one day and stopped at a friend's to take a draught of the nut-brown ale served in a brown jug. Then each is Mr Taylor's special when brought...  
The old man had many daughters, but only one son who was first, Benjamin,

and the son of his old age, he would follow me and take me to show me the rabbit hutch he had made for himself, and the pony he rode, and the gun he used . . . they send their milk to London - it was their opportunity to dress themselves in style. ... which I have verified by the British Museum as see commentary at the end.

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Steam and water agreed that they would fly through a mile of earth and accomplish this bet - the elements letting each "ring" alone - hence, becomes tunnel on the G.W.R.

I think this would be very ridiculous and would fail in its intended effect.. .  
but I think the silkworm idea would overcome one other small delay.

"The House of Mammon" - a very good title for the novel.

Honest cheating - making an amount of £50 over the price, originally worth only £20 - a good subject for the article.

In the autumn the political leaders will almost despair, then it will be my time.

*Standard, Daily News* etc. - both will take over eight or ten slips as well.

*Standard* - column alone for now - then the *Daily News*.

"Sweating Boxes" - American ships' nicknames - should not be in the small coffin-like boxes over the

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boilers of ships and sweated down.

The new game would be first-rate for the *Standard* in the autumn.

1. The twenty types - would they do for the series? Not the *Standard* or the *Daily News*?
2. Subjective criticism of speeches delivered during the season in eight articles - from the reports in the *Times* it would then do for the *Standard* or *Daily News*
3. Something like reflection on Livy, only on political, social or something which has just gone, or is going, past.
4. Something like the undeveloped England - coal, iron, chalk, clay - Channel Tunnel etc., etc., and land - four articles.
5. Like Judicature - good things.
6. Six or seven descriptive sketches of what? The country life is average life?
7. Ask House the question - what should you do if you had the newspaper to make it sell well? The inception is the solution. Something new will come like an idea - genuine.

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7. The extension of language so as to express ourselves more generally. The information on this is broad enough - you want something broad and compelling. Some new phase of journalism to come like everything out, suddenly to make - although not so expensive. If I can get this original idea, I shall get what I want... He may use every one of them.  
Also. Restless - series of - on what?
8. Sports and pigeon shooting etc. In fact way done varies as it turns to the late Greek philosopher.
9. Homes . . . under subscription . . . give room for descriptive sketches. Ask them for permission to visit their country seats.
10. On actual condition of agricultural and rural society at this time - these combined

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go down well - proofs just in my articles in the magazines in the early part of the month. See list for kinds of, and modify for world-ism.  
Ethical - as optimist, progress per Nature.  
Papyrus manuscript.  
Science.  
Art - destruction of cathedrals - visit them and describe the injury to restoration.  
Machiavelli's Prince contrasted with modern policies and events, as India.  
etc. This would almost  
do for every other but the *World* - write and forward it to Edmund Yates -forward a good many of them to me if not accepted by *Standard* or *Daily News*

*To be continued. Published by permission of the British Library.*

# Richard Jefferies' Writing Criticised and Defended

*Eric Jones*

Whatever Richard Jefferies does or does not attempt in his writings, a judgement as to their overall effect must surely be favourable. We need rely only on the uncanny thoroughness of his reportage and -the knock-out defence - the stellar quality of his prose. The writings have their limitations but remain outstanding for their insights and descriptions. His style is unusual but he gets away with sharp transitions of subject matter and mood because the flow at once picks up again so smoothly. The stream of words may suddenly halt but it immediately starts to course down another channel. We are borne along, intoxicated by the flow, and straightaway forget the change of tack. To this day the language does not sound as old-fashioned as that of some later authors and it is often smoother. The people who read out passages at Richard Jefferies Society gatherings are not driven to stumble. We also learn a lot from Jefferies because he touches on so very many aspects of the countryside. His texts are simultaneously specific and general and he accurately extrapolates from his microcosm many of the wider trends at work in England.

When preparing this note I read the five books at the heart of his *oeuvre*, together with two or three collections of his rural pieces, notably *The Hills and the Vale* and *Landscape with Figures*<sup>1</sup>. The books are *The Gamekeeper at Home*, *Wild life in a Southern County*, *The Amateur Poacher*, *Hodge and His Masters*, and *Round About a Great Estate*\* Were all his other writings to be destroyed, Jefferies' reputation would rest secure on the basis of this quintet and might be enhanced. Others rate the mystical quality of different writings highly but I am sceptical about judgements concerning something which almost by definition cannot be turned into interpersonal knowledge.

Nor am I persuaded by appraisals of the holistic, hagiographical or 'other men's flowers' varieties, especially if they refer to innovations that supposedly presaged other authors like D H Lawrence or Henry Williamson but which Jefferies himself did not develop very far. I am reminded of Oscar Wilde's remark that he expected to be met at the Pearly Gates by St Peter, bearing an armful of sumptuously bound volumes and declaring, 'Mr Wilde, these are your unwritten works.' Perhaps St Peter greeted Richard Jefferies the same way - I hope so - but we cannot take on ourselves praising the dead for a promise they never fully realised. This is not a criticism of Jefferies, who tried a lot of things in fiction and non-fiction; was not his own master insofar as he had to earn a living by his pen; and had far too short a life to hatch all his eggs. It is a comment on what I see as a blind alley in criticism. For me, Jefferies was superb at the craft of rural social and topographical writing; this can be applauded for the way the texts are put together and its value can be assessed by its use to the historian. Although even his major works are not as impressive as they might have been had he

developed a proper model of social and economic change, the compelling nature of his prose draws one back inside the society of his day in a way that more analytical writers seldom if ever match.

The district Jefferies covered was the tract from Marlborough to Cirencester that we know as '*Jefferies' Land*', ie, a rather small extent of northeast Wiltshire, with a tongue just into Berkshire (occupied north Berkshire, now called Oxfordshire), together with the southeastern corner of Gloucestershire. Although he was a Wiltshireman and the heart of his territory lay in that county, I believe that at least one of the five texts central to his opus, *Hodge and His Masters*, was substantially based on Gloucestershire material. One of his colleagues states as much.<sup>3</sup> The claim for Jefferies' role as a Wiltshire writer is certainly correct but is exaggerated through what might be called Moonraker chauvinism.

Richard Jefferies worked as a journalist from 1866 to 1872 and altogether was resident in Wiltshire between 1858 and 1876, or from when he was ten until he was 28. Accordingly the main period during which his material was gathered covered the last years of arable prosperity and only the initial sliding into depression. He is said to have given up agricultural journalism for more general rural essays in January 1879, though I cannot see that he let his knowledge of the agricultural economy get out of date." After 1876 came the move to London suburbia or exurbia, which took him away from what he saw as the numinous landscape of his upbringing, cut him off from the roots of his material, and was a tragedy only outclassed by his grossly premature death. Jefferies went on processing the harvest he had picked in the orchards of the Upper Thames and the Wiltshire Downs. There was little else he could do. As one of Nancy Mitford's heroines says, 'in Surrey, when you see blossom, you know there will be no fruit.'<sup>5</sup>

My central aim here is to defend Jefferies against the charge by the historian Ronald Hutton that he was virtually the originator of the myth of a 'Merrie England' placed sometime in the past. I once recommended two excellent books by Hutton to my colleague on the Council of the Richard Jefferies Society, John Webb, but John also bought a third volume, on witchcraft.<sup>6</sup> This he lent me, protesting that I had landed him with a work that traduces Richard Jefferies by calling him a Londoner, clearly an indictable offence, and misspells his name, which we can all agree is a hanging matter.

Hutton swipes at a number of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century authors for creating a 'full-blown modern cult of rural nostalgia', the history of which has been studied by scholars like W J Keith and which, he notes, still persists.<sup>7</sup> In earlier times rural people had commonly been portrayed as brutes but during the nineteenth century they came to be credited with all the virtues, supposedly in reaction against the expanding urban industrial lifestyle. 'The shrinking and depopulating countryside -especially the soft arable and downland landscape of southern England - had become/ according to Hutton, 'the epitome of continuity, community, and social harmony.'<sup>8</sup> Hutton lists Jefferies as one of the first offending commentators, followed by Rider Haggard, Hudson, Sturt, Masefield, v Thomas, Massingham, and Jacquetta

Hawkes, and a little later by George Ewart Evans, with among the writers of fiction, Hardy, Kipling, Kenneth Grahame and D H Lawrence.

Hutton has no difficulty in showing that the rural eulogies and religious beliefs of most of these people were laughable. Of Jacquetta Hawkes, for instance, he remarks that 'like most of her compatriots, she managed to regard an intensively managed and long-developed set of agricultural landscapes as "nature"'.<sup>9</sup> 'Merrie England' writers tend to treat the landscape as if it had, or should have, eternal life and was not instead the outcome of historically recoverable sequences of exploitation. Jefferies on the other hand was well aware of its historical phases, as we can tell from his observations on prehistoric remains, the Napoleonic wars and successive agricultural changes in his own day; he does not fall into the trap of depicting a timeless countryside. Ten or fifteen years after the Second World War nostalgic attitudes resurfaced in the 'Golden Age' history of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* and the yearning for what had never been in Tolkien's fantasy of 'Middle Earth'. So much for ecological history: some of the commentators succeeded in commending at one and the same time 'natural' landscapes and plough agriculture. Sir William Beach Thomas certainly declared a preference for the destructive orderliness of arable farming when he wrote *How England Becomes Prairie*, which was partly a lament about the tumbledown land of the Aldbourne district during the late-nineteenth century and interwar periods.<sup>10</sup>

From the naturalist's point of view it would have been - it has been - disastrous for a protectionist booster like Beach Thomas to have his way: what he saw as 'prairie' was in reality lightly grazed downland strewn with orchids and containing patches of scrub where red-backed shrikes nested; with golden sheets of St John's Wort as the engaging J R A Hockin described above Combe in the 1930s; and dense populations of stone curlews like those George Brown counted there between 1930 and 1946." To the naturalist these are more appealing images than monocultures from which, in an intensification today of trends already evident in Jefferies' youth, the barrows have been ploughed out and the very skylarks have been expelled. Moreover, it would have been tragic for the well-being of the former farm workers and their descendants who left for the Antipodes and North America had they been obliged to go on drudging in wet English fields to produce cereals. Grain has been better imported from those regions from Jefferies' day to this (the two world wars only excepted). It would have been tragic for those who stayed in England to have remained stuck with a dear loaf merely because it was produced at home. As Adam Smith said, it makes no sense at all to buy imprudently as a nation when one would not do for one's own household.

Although there were always fluctuations in rural prosperity and hence differences between periods, I find it impossible to decide exactly which period the nostalgic writers intended to portray as Merrie England. They may as well begin their work 'Once upon a time...' and it is reasonable for Hutton to deride

them. Yet Jefferies was not one of them and I would urge that he was unusual in his self-taught grasp of the deeper issues. The English middle classes, abetted by 'Merrie England' fancies, may see the implications of agricultural protection only through rose-coloured mist but Jefferies simply should not be associated with this.

At most times Hutton is preternaturally sensitive to historical method and evidence but I wonder whether he really did read the five 'popular' books on the 'delights of rusticity' that Jefferies published in 1878 to 1880? He alludes to them but does not document them. His evidence against Jefferies is solely the mawkish last sentence of *The Amateur Poacher*, which claims that in the great outdoors, 'a something the ancients called divine can be found and felt there still.'<sup>12</sup> The landscape of which Jefferies wrote was workaday and in the throes of severe, mundane changes, as he ordinarily reported better than almost anybody, and a stray comment like this does make one cringe. But it is a stray comment. The temptation is always to finish a book with a rhetorical flourish but the single remark is quite insufficient to condemn Jefferies as a townie sentimentalist.

For those who do wish to criticise Jefferies there are undoubtedly a few notes in his eye. Extenuating circumstances help to explain the man as well as to justify him. A solitary youth with little formal education and no one much to challenge his ideas may be forgiven for stretching out his dream time. This makes it the more impressive that he saw through the fallacies of agricultural protectionism. Jefferies' important work was sandwiched between his adolescent yearning and the mysticism that seems to have become more evident in his last period. Sadly, some of his later passages may have been tubercular fantasies and at any rate the numinous, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. Also he was a freelance trying to make a living and other remarks may merely have been journalistic filler. The paradox of journalists is that they fulfil vital social functions but often sully this by seeming willing to write anything for effect. In Jefferies' case this may go a little way towards explaining inconsistencies in his opinions, such as his ambivalence about educating the working classes. Other inconsistencies probably stem from his evolving response to the descent into arable depression, something even he did not entirely anticipate, though he came to chart it well.

As a novelist Jefferies cannot be held to be one of the greats but his rural writings are word-pictures that would do any novelist proud. He had an omniscient eye. He does not seem to be nostalgic. Only by hunting down chance remarks can he be made to construct a 'Merrie England' myth. The fact that he can recognise beauty when he sees it says nothing as to the aims of the landowning and farming system of which it was an unintended consequence. He works with what he sees and maybe, when he does speak of poverty or injustice, the reader is led to glide over the brute facts because the prose is so finely crafted. The worst Jefferies can be accused of is writing lyrical realism in which the awkward corners of life are rounded into narratives. If he sins, it is more by omission than

commission. He constructs no theory of the rural society in which he grew up and which began to alter so drastically around him during his early adulthood. Despite his lasting prose, his views, so individual and farseeing in certain respects, still reflect his audience and the society he lived in. Social critics tend not to come from rural southern England where there are few of the radical groups found in the north or London to reinforce opinion and offer support; these were neither the circles nor the directions in which he moved. His temperament, education and audience did not encourage an intellectual approach, though one need be in no doubt that he would have been capable of it.

If one chooses, one may therefore accuse Jefferies of appearing to sanitise a society which, looking back from our scarcely untarnished and obviously inequitable countryside, and by any reasonable comparison in his own time, was extraordinarily unjust. He may be said to be inadvertently accommodating of the self-delusion, self-satisfaction and self-interest with which, as Hutton correctly points out, most similar writers portray rural England. On the other hand, the nostalgics came after him and he cannot be blamed for not digging the graves of their inventions in advance.

Although Jefferies' experience was clearly bounded in time and some passages can be precisely located in space, the overall portrait he paints is not always easy to evaluate because the representativeness of his case studies is often uncertain. He continues to be much used because he offers a goldmine of observations but, significantly, historians tend to dig out only bits and pieces, in substantiation of particular points. He invites this usage because he scatters astute observations broadcast. It must be the journalist in him that often causes him to suppress identifiers in his reporting in order to simulate a generality that, strictly speaking, the local instances coming under his notice cannot sustain. We can accept that the categories of people he describes did exist, with their characteristic occupations, dwellings and types of personality, but frequently we do not know when he is describing an individual or place as opposed to a modal member of a group. We do not always know when he was taking a photograph or painting a picture. A bit of both, I think. From talking with family and friends, Edward Thomas certainly makes free with identifications and Jefferies was not frightened of portraying places and people that might be identified. For instance, we have his colleague's testimony that Fleeceborough is Cirencester, as is rather obvious, and mention of the then Lord Bathurst must therefore have been intended.<sup>13</sup>

The strongest case for believing that we are reading the exact, though disguised, portrayals of a reporter rather than the fabrications of a novelist is thus made when his colleague states that the Fleeceborough and other essays in *Hodge and His Masters* are 'almost literal reproductions of Jefferies' experiences at this time in Cirencester and the district.'<sup>14</sup> The Gamekeeper's identity is of course known and so is the ground of the Burderop estate. Jefferies will have had

individuals in mind for at least some of the personalities he introduces but this is beside the point. Even photographic accuracy in individual portrayal does not resolve the issue of representativeness. There may have been a Farmer X but the relevant question is, how many other farmers displayed the same characteristics and had the same communal experience? This inconclusiveness by no means destroys the faithfulness of Jefferies' writings but does limit their value.

On the other hand, the fact that at least some of his vignettes were faithful portraits, contemporary to him and by no means always laudatory of the individuals portrayed, helps to refute Hutton's charge that he was among the first to conjure into being a 'cult of rural nostalgia'. A celebration of rural continuity, yes; Jefferies quizzed his older relatives and did some field and documentary work as a local historian. A celebration of community and social harmony, no; the society he observed was under great strain, both in fact and in his accounts of it. He spoke about history but did not retreat into an imagined past. Jefferies offers something different from professional history, that is to say reportage lifted to an art form.

Jefferies' five classics are largely an exile's remembering and if they are poetic, recall that poetry has been defined as emotion recollected in tranquillity. Perhaps it was having exiled himself about London that concentrated his mind so wondrously, like the expectation of being hanged. Had he survived and remained in Wiltshire, I expect that he would have produced a great unsentimental work on the travails of the countryside during the agricultural depression. Had he lived out only his three score years and ten this would have taken him into the Great War and his experience would have overlapped that of his Wiltshire successor, A G Street. He would have been able to see the full impact of the arable depression and its short, steep recovery during the First World War, in other words to put a frame round the whole period 1879-1913. His early death left him bereft of what it is fashionable to call closure. In a literary sense, he nevertheless succeeded in transcending much of the experience of the Jefferies' Land he describes. Although the topographical detail is fascinating to decode, it is secondary to the central fact about Richard Jefferies: that he transmuted his history and topography into abiding prose.

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6. Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
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8. *Ibid.*, p 117.
9. *Ibid.*, p 279.
10. Sir William Beach Thomas, *How England Becomes Prairie* (London: Ernest Benn, 1927).
11. J R A Hockin, *On Foot in Berkshire* (London: Alexander Maclehose, 1934), p 180; George Brown, 'The Stone Curlew', *Trans. Neivbury District Field Club IX*, 2-4 (1951), pp 26-32.
12. Quoted by Hutton, *The Triumph*, p 118.
13. Jefferies did claim that certain figures were drawn from life, see Matthews and Treitel, *op. cit.*, p 109. Edward Thomas, *Richard Jefferies*, p 5, asserts that Overborough and Fleeceborough are both Marlborough but this is surely wrong. I have no doubt that Thomas is however correct in identifying the heart of Jefferies' countryside as much more tightly concentrated than Baddeley *op. cit.*, suggests but there is no real inconsistency. 'Jefferies Land' is an elastic concept. The vicinity of Coate and Burderop was immediate home territory, as depicted above all in *Gamekeeper*, while the slightly longer stretch from there to Bishopstone as described by Thomas, was the terrain of, say, *Wildlife*, and Baddeley's expansive area towards Cirencester was the zone of much of Jefferies' professional agricultural journalism, as in *Hodge*.
14. Baddeley, *op cit.*, p.317.

# Henry Williamson's Debt to Richard Jefferies

Richard Stewart

In 1919, not long after returning from the battlefields of Flanders, traumatised, shell-shocked and suffering from dysentery, a young man who had enlisted aged 18 years and 5 months found himself in a secondhand bookshop in Folkestone. His own emotional circumstances echoed a part of the introduction to his early book *The Lone Swallows*: 'After the Great War there was a vacancy on the earth, a sadness of vanished scenes and faces'.<sup>1</sup>

He was not suicidal, not likely to upset the Mrs Dalloways of this world by impaling himself on sharp railings, but he had suffered much: not just the horrors of war but what Wilfred Owen described as 'the pity of war'.<sup>2</sup> Henry Williamson had witnessed that first Christmas truce in 1914, which he so graphically described in *The Pathway* and *A fox Under My Cloak*, and the hollow depths of national animosity; only the threats of the senior officers had persuaded both sides to resume fighting.

Then he came across a book by Richard Jefferies. Although he quickly read it, in rapt attention, right to the end, it was not quite a 'road to Damascus' moment, since the young Henry Williamson was well acquainted with Jefferies already. The Spring 2003 Journal of the Henry Williamson Society includes a photo of the young Henry Williamson seated beside Jefferies' grave at Worthing. In his Introduction to Dent's Everyman's Library Edition of *Bevis* (1966) he recounts how as a boy of ten he read the book late into the night, and in his own selection from Jefferies, which I will return to later, he writes of a secret life lived within the pages of his grandfather's copies of *Bevis*, *The Amateur Poacher* and *Wild Life in a Southern County*. That same grandfather actually visited Jefferies at Brighton to express his appreciation for his writing. But this wasn't one of those books. It was a book with no facts, no dates, no specific points of reference. *The Story of My Heart*, in the words of his biographer Anne Williamson, was for him 'an outpouring of mystical and spiritual growth' and 'a revelation of total truth'.<sup>3</sup>

*The Story of My Heart* is a unique book and in his biography of Richard Jefferies, Edward Thomas writes that Jefferies 'cries in the wilderness, and the strangeness of the crying cannot but avail. Life cannot remain the same as it was before the book; we must be a little more liberal, more adventurous, more expectant and aware, than before. In his passion for humanity he is with Lucretius and Shelley, and his revolting note, like theirs, is woven into the great music; he has the true rhythm of life, as the tide and also the earthquake has'.<sup>4</sup>

Of the many later references Williamson makes to this revelatory book, this is part of a much longer series of passages in *The Gale of the World*: 'All the experience of the greatest city in the world could not withhold me. I rejected it wholly. I stood bare-

headed in the sun, in the presence of earth and air, in the presences of the immense forces of the universe. I demand that which will make me perfect now, this hour.<sup>5</sup> Its immediate effect was to focus his life again, to strengthen his determination to become a writer, his purpose was, according to Anne Williamson, to 'extend Jefferies' truth of redemption through nature to his fellow men'.<sup>6</sup> Jefferies was the prophet, the catalyst: and in a nature journal dated February 1920 to mid-1922 the heading was 'Henry William Williamson, Naturalist and Disciple of the Master Richard Jefferies'. A brief perusal of the index in Anne Williamson's biography emphasises the importance of Jefferies to Williamson. If we take those other writers who many would rank highly in their writings about nature and the countryside, the number of references is as follows: Gilbert White none, Thomas Hardy one, W H Hudson three, Edward Thomas six and Richard Jefferies twenty-one. Edward Thomas, in his Jefferies biography, commented that 'given an entirely suitable subject, he wrote with a natural fineness and richness and a carelessness too, like the blackbird's singing'.<sup>7</sup> This passage from the last long paragraph of his greatest essay 'The Pageant of Summer' exemplifies this:

I cannot leave it; I must stay under the old tree in the midst of the long grass, the luxury of the leaves, and the song in the very air. I seem as if I could feel all the glowing life the sunshine gives and the south wind calls to being. The endless grass, the endless leaves, the immense strength of the oak expanding, the unalloyed joy of finch and blackbird; from all of them I receive a little. Each gives me something of the pure joy they gather for themselves. In the blackbird's melody one note is mine; in the dance of the leaf shadows the formed maze is for me, though the motion is theirs;... The exceeding beauty of the earth, in her splendour of life, yields a new thought with every petal. The hours when the mind is absorbed by beauty are the only hours when we really live ..<sup>8</sup>

An analysis of his early books will reinforce the allegiance both to Jefferies' vision, style, and to some extent subject matter. *The Lone Swallows*, my own personal introduction to Williamson, was published in 1922, though some was written as far back as 1919 or earlier. The dedication is to Jefferies, there are at least ten references to him or his works, direct quotes like 'Where man goes, nature ends' and constant similar reminders of Jefferies' works: 'There is hope in the wide and open sky', and 'All the loveliness of fled summers returns to the mind. The spread disc of the dandelion, so richly hued, is more beautiful now, bearing in colour so many hopes of the past'. Old Bob the keeper makes an appearance and has remarkable similarities to the Jefferies character who appears in several of his books. From the same book the essay 'Meadow Grasses', written in 1920, has many similarities - just two comparisons, first Williamson's 'the sunbeams had flooded the cold earth during the springtime of the year' and Jefferies from *The Pageant of Summer*, 'The fervour of the sunbeams descending in a tidal flood rings on the strung harp of earth' and again from the same two sources, first Williamson's 'The soul of summer was everywhere, the earth filled

with swelling ecstasy - everything so green and alive, the waving grasses and the hawthorns' and Jefferies 'Living things leap in the grass, living things drift upon the air, living things are coming forth to breathe in every hawthorn bush'. Incidentally, it took no great detective work on my part - Williamson wrote about this essay that it was deliberately in the style of Jefferies.

These similarities are obvious in the four 'Willie Maddison' books, collectively titled *The Flax of Dream* published early in Williamson's writing career, between 1922 and 1928. Professor Blench noted how in *The Beautiful Years* Jim Holloman, the crow starver, a character, according to biographer Anne Williamson, created as a tribute to Jefferies, watches the dawn with the young Willie Maddison:

'Look', whispered Jim, pointing to the east. Over the dark outlines of the beech wood hung a star, a lustrous globe of radiance, larger than any star Willie had ever seen. They watched in silence. Slowly it moved higher glowing with a softer and purer blaze as it was lapped by the light now flowing into the eastern estuary of heaven. It was neither white nor golden, nor would any colour describe it: the darkness paled before the spectral dawn. Looking up into the sky, he saw that the stars were keener than before. Light, mystic light, the life of the world was flooding like an incoming tide into the dusked shallows of dawn. Gradually, the footpath through the field showed up; from among the corn a lark rose singing in the sky - he too had seen the Morning Star... As it rose higher the light-bringer shone with whiter fire; one by one the stars in deeper heaven grew wan and sank into the waters of day. Like a motionless sea, light swept up the sky purging it of darkness, glowing in the lofty empyrean, bringing life and joy to living things.<sup>10</sup>

In *Greene Ferne Farm*, Geoffrey sees a similar dawn, having spent the night outside:

Out from the last fringe of mist shone a great white globe. Like molten silver, glowing with a lusciousness of light, soft and yet brilliant, so large and bright and seemingly so near - but just above the ridge yonder -shining with heavenly splendour in the very dayspring. He knew Eosphorus, the Light-Bringer, the morning star of hope and joy and love, and his heart went out towards the beauty and the glory of it. Under him the broad bosom of the earth seemed to breathe instinct with life, bearing him up, and from the azure ether came the wind, filling his chest with the vigour of the young day."

Jim Holloman dies after being carried away by a mud slide of marl as he slept close to the warmth of a lime quarry - Jefferies mentions a similar incident -and again there are strong similarities between the description of the grandfather clock in Chapter 3 and the first chapter of *The Amateur Poacher*, Dolly swimming in Chapter 8 and a similar scene with Felise in *The Dewy Morn*, and Chapter 27 ends with the two young boys deciding to run away to America. The young Jefferies and a friend did the same - they didn't get very far.

The influence of Jefferies is equally strong in the next 3 books - at least 8 references in *Dandelion Days*, at least 9 in *The Dream of Fair Women* and 12 or more in *The Pathway*, climaxing in *The Dream of Fair Women*, Chapter 8 when 'Maddison read aloud how the dying Jefferies had remembered the summers of his youth when he had been in love' followed by four separate Jefferies quotes. It was whilst writing these books that Williamson made a pilgrimage to Coate Water in 1925 and again in 1936 and at times in these early books the presence of Jefferies is so evident and obvious that one is ironically reminded of a much later Henry Williamson comment: 'Jefferies was born two, perhaps three, generations before his time'.<sup>12</sup>

Can I swiftly add that I am not suggesting plagiarism. Williamson also, in these four books, frequently quoted Blake, Keats, Swinburne and Shelley. He may have been a self-confessed disciple, but he wasn't a slave. There are many here today, including myself, who write and get published regularly. Few of us could claim, with any completed work, that it was entirely original. It was just, as Dr Blench remarked, that sometimes 'a passage of Jefferies was in his (Williamson's) mind as he wrote'.<sup>13</sup> In his tribute to Henry Williamson Dr Blench described the writer as 'all along his own man and finally attains to a wisdom which I think we neglect at our peril'.<sup>14</sup>

If we take an enormous literary leap to *The Gale of the World*, published in 1969, and the last of the books in *A Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight*, the style, content and preoccupations are very different. There *is* still the theme of Jefferies 'redemption through nature' but less directly about nature itself. Having said that, some shorter passages in what is a richly textured book, full of references to literature, poetry and music, are remarkable: the flying ants interrupting a cricket match, and during a stag hunt: 'two young hounds, entries of that season, had lost their way. They had been wandering about in the storm when the stag had appeared, an apparition surrounded by blue shimmer. They followed it docilely; and when the stag reached the raised mound and lay down they lay beside it, for comfort and warmth'.<sup>15</sup> Richard Jefferies could well have related a similar incident in his book *Red Deer* but he could not have produced the multi-layered subject matter of this book, particularly the preoccupation with politics - Mosley gets an acknowledgement and several mentions and there is a spine-chilling passage about the manner in which condemned Nazi leaders went to the gallows. Jefferies gets three mentions, two very short and the third several quotes from *The Story of My Heart*.

By now, just six years before his death, Williamson had long become his own man. There was probably a recognition that he was writing as 'the last Romantic' to quote part of Anne Williamson's biography title, and for much of his later life he expressed personal discomfort in the realisation that his lasting literary legacy would be *Tarka the Otter*, for which he was awarded The Hawthornden Prize in 1928.

I would still find it difficult to decide which of these two writers possessed the greater vision or the wider coverage of subject matter. If I had to decide, it would be Jefferies for vision, Williamson for subject matter, with a much greater fund of literary knowledge to weave in with his words. I must, in all fairness, add that I am acutely conscious that I have not read every one of Henry Williamson's many books and I

have no doubt some in this audience are in a better position to decide. Considering his short life, from 1848 to 1887, just 38 years old when he died, Jefferies covered an immense number of topics and styles in his essays and books, from field-play to feng-shui, from blackbirds to Brighton belles.

What Jefferies lacked, either through inclination, temperament, impecuniosity, poor health or a combination of several of these, was the broad and multi-faceted canvas of life on which Henry Williamson was able to paint so remarkably, his paint of course being words. Anne Williamson remarked that he was a 'soldier, naturalist, broadcaster, journalist, farmer, visionary, writer'<sup>16</sup> and that list isn't exhaustive. What I think can be agreed, with some degree of certainty, is that Williamson could not have written either *The Story of My Heart* or that visionary novel cum documentary *After London*. Equally Jefferies could not have produced the incredible *Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight* or *Tarka the Otter*. To follow up that last title, Jefferies' comments about otters are almost exclusively in the third person or reported from newspapers. There is little evidence he saw few, or even any, alive.

Looking closely at both men, there are many differences, and my contention is that some of these led to the one-time disciple increasingly creating his own literary world. Williamson had more time than Jefferies, living more than twice as long and dying at 82. This allowed him not just to write many more books but also to have the time to take longer to revise them before publication. *Tarka the Otter* went into 17 revisions, though only seven versions still exist. The author walked the whole of Tarka's route in the book, quite a physical feat, to verify each detail. Jefferies never had the time to do that, or the financial success that allowed Williamson to buy property and land, including the farm at Stiffkey on the Norfolk coast. There is an element of truth in Elwin's Introduction to *The Essential Richard Jefferies*, when he remarked that 'much of his later and more polished writing is marred by the infirmities of habitual haste'<sup>17</sup> - only a grain of truth though - if you read it again slowly. You will note the contradiction it contains and Looker did have a prompt and point-to-point written rebuttal of all his criticisms.<sup>18</sup> Both the original and Looker's response are in the Richard Jefferies Society's Library.

The First World War was also one of the strongest forces influencing Williamson's literary career - five of the books in *A Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight* reflect this preoccupation. Jefferies experienced no wars, other than those imagined in books like *Bevis* and *After London*. Williamson was also a better novelist. He praised Jefferies for some novels and described *Amaryllis at the Fair* as 'one of the most lovely, calm and balanced novels of country life and people in our literature'.<sup>19</sup> However, Williamson was more adept at the commercially viable novel and the Henry Williamson Society's Newsletter reported that even in 2001 the Penguin *Tarka the Otter* sold 40,000 copies worldwide. Perhaps the best way of emphasising this is to quote the respective endings of *Amaryllis at the Fair* and *Tarka the Otter*:

In the play of Faust - Alere's *Faust* - Goethe has put an interlude, an Intermezzo; I shall leave Amaryllis and Amadis in their Interlude in Heaven. Let the Play of Human Life,

with its sorrows and its Dread, pause awhile; let Care go aside behind the wings, let Debt and Poverty unrobe, let Age stand upright, let Time stop still (oh, Miracle! as the Sun did in the Vale of Ajalon). Let us leave our lovers in the Interlude in Heaven.

And as I must leave them (I trust but for a little while) I will leave them on the brown oak timber, sap-stain brown, in the sunshine and dancing shadows of summer, among the long grass and the wild flowers.<sup>20</sup>

Deadlock saw the small brown head, and threw his tongue in triumph as he jumped down the bank. He seized it, and lifted the otter high, flung him about and fell into the water with him. They saw the broken head look up beside Deadlock, heard the cry of *Ic-yang!* as Tarka bit into his throat, and then the hound was sinking with the otter into the deep water. Oak-leaves, black and rotting in the mud of the unseen bed, arose and swirled and sank again. And the tide slowed still, and began to move back, and they waited and watched, until the body of Deadlock arose, drowned and heavy, and floated away amidst the froth on the waters.

They pulled the body out of the river and carried it to the bank, laying it on the grass, and looking down at the dead hound in sad wonder. And while they stood there silently, a great bubble rose out of the depths and broke, and as they watched, another bubble shook to the surface, and broke; and there was a third bubble in the sea-going waters, and nothing more.

Jefferies could tell a story succinctly, with good character studies and an underlying message about agricultural conditions and life-style. The story of Roger the Reaper in 'One of the New Voters', collected in the book *The Open Air* was one such example, ending with the memorable 'the wheat is beautiful but human life is labour'.<sup>22</sup> A second was 'The Field Play', in two sections from the collection *The Life of the Fields* but these two are respectively 16 pages with one main character and 21 pages with two main characters. Both are succinct to fit into the type of length required for a magazine essay. Jefferies, let loose on the full length novel, is far less disciplined. I have already quoted the ending of *Amaryllis at the Fair* though within its pages are some exquisite studies, especially of Farmer Iden, wandering bare-footed in the orchard dew or pretending to be asleep so that the house mice would venture out:

The sleeping man was as still and quiet as if carved.

A mouse came to the foot, clad in a great rusty-hued, iron-shod boot -the foot that rested on the fender, for he had crossed his knees. His ragged and dingy trouser, full of March dust, and earth-stained by labour, was drawn up somewhat higher than the boot. It took the mouse several trials to reach the trouser, but he succeeded, and audaciously mounted to Iden's knee. Another quickly followed, and there the pair of them feasted on the crumbs of bread and cheese caught in the folds of his trousers.<sup>23</sup>

In reality Iden is fully awake, deliberately restraining his breath, and Jefferies adds that a long psychological discussion might be held on the apparent inconsistency

of Iden observing and encouraging them in his kitchen while trapping and then killing them in his larder and cellar.

Turning to another novel by Jefferies, *The Dewy Morn*, this would have been one of his best novels had either a reader or prospective publisher insisted on the deletion of several long and rambling passages, or at least their length being drastically reduced. The most obvious is an excruciatingly long and misplaced passage about the local squire, which covers 27 pages. One has only to consider the difference made to that great novel of the twentieth century, *The Lord of the Flies*, when it was suggested to William Golding that the first part, describing in detail the circumstances under which the boys reached the desert island, could be completely deleted.

John Fowles, a novelist with a reputation and track record that would strongly qualify him to judge the work of a fellow writer, wrote in his introduction to the World's Classics edition of *After London* that 'Nothing, beyond blindness, can make of Jefferies a nature-writer of less than genius; and nothing, beyond an excess of sympathy, can make him a great novelist' adding that 'Jefferies can always observe adults accurately, and sometimes in great depth; but only what they are, not what they might become'.<sup>24</sup> This is strong criticism of Jefferies as a novelist, but one has to admit that it is largely true.

One could scarcely imagine even the most scathing of reviewers making, with justification, similar comments about Williamson's novels. Perhaps the reaction of the Sitwells to *Salar the Salmon* was particularly antagonistic and there was also vociferous reaction to the publication of *The Gold Falcon* in 1933. However, if you portray well-known people, especially those from the literary world, in a thinly disguised and critical way in a book, then make the author anonymous, you are asking for reviews from the likes of J B Priestley, who wrote that it was a 'gigantic oozing slab of self-pity'.

That highlights another important difference between the two writers. Williamson knew many influential people: Masefield and Galsworthy, T E Lawrence, and later Ted Hughes and Kenneth Allsop, to name but a few. Jefferies did not move in such high literary circles. I believe he was actually present with Thomas Hardy at one function, but there is no record of the two conversing. Knowing the right people is important in the literary world and although Jefferies had some famous illustrators occasionally, like Whymper, Williamson at his pivotal literary moments had access to the great skills of Tunnicliffe. Anne Williamson commented that he was also, on the social scene, 'a powerful and magnetic figure throughout his life',<sup>25</sup> That could hardly be said of Jefferies, whose family life and sexual experience was, as far as we know, very ordinary compared to Williamson's picaresques, 'barleybrights' and the menage-a-trois that accompanied part of his married life. Jefferies did have some degree of humour: consider for example his efforts to enjoy the watery pleasures of the modern



Thames in *The Open Air* or some of his studies, such as 'A Bicycle Farmer' in *Hodge and His Masters*. Williamson's humour was more frequent and evident. Think of the way he describes his outwitting of the bogus rat catcher in *The Story of a Norfolk Farm* and the warm study of his neighbour in *The Lone Swallows*:

He is a funny little fellow, about two and a half years old, with yellow curls and solemn brown eyes. His name is Ernie and his father is a labourer, a very kind man. He used to spend all his money at the inn, but suddenly took a wife and drank no more. When Ernie is a naughty boy he threatens to go 'up to pub' and Ernie wails immediately, and is good again.

'I got this one,' says Ernie, coming to the cottage door, holding out in filthy paw a piece of cake.

'You ain't got this one, 'ave ee?'

'Go away, Ernie, I'm writing.'

'You ain't got this one,' he replies, munching the cake, 'ave ee, Mis'r Wisson?'

I feel more comfortable in the company of children than with 'grown ups'; and to discourage his talk I put my tongue out, and make a hideous face.

'Ah'll cut ees tongue off, ah wull,' he gravely warns, repeating what his mother has said to him when he has done it to her - a frequent happening, I fear; I taught him to do it'.<sup>26</sup>

This very personal and intimate writing is also evident in other books, such as *The Children of Shallowford* but, except for his spiritual outpourings, you never really encounter this in Jefferies. He was, however, from a different generation, more literarily reserved in such matters.

The draft of *The Story of a Norfolk Farm* was partly written in a Police Station at Wells on the north Norfolk coast where Williamson was questioned about his Fascist beliefs, his support for Mosley and Mussolini and the early years of the Nazis. Most critics use the word 'naive' in relation to his avowal of this cause, but his passion was genuine and sustained, however misguided in retrospect. He aroused the wrath of village neighbours by putting a swastika in his window and he suffered a much deeper personal tragedy when The Establishment refused to honour his literary achievements, even on his 80th birthday. There is insufficient time to pursue his politics more deeply, but they influenced much of his work, particularly in *A Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight*: Mussolini, in fact, is even referred to back in 1922 in *The Lone Swallows*.

Jefferies' political theories were radical, but more acceptable, with many essays, particularly in *Hodge and His Masters* highlighting the problems of poverty, destitution and the subsequent human degradation involved. It was Jefferies, who wrote with Gandhi-like perception in 'Meadow Thoughts': 'The surface of the earth offers to us far more than we can consume - the grains, the seeds, the fruits, the animals, the abounding products are beyond the power of all the human race to devour. They can, too, be multiplied a thousandfold. There is no natural lack. Whenever there is lack among us it is from artificial causes, which intelligence should remove.'<sup>27</sup>

I wonder what Jefferies would have thought about GM crops? I wonder what Williamson would have thought about American Foreign Policy?

Williamson also enjoyed good health and a high level of stamina almost all his life - even in the Police Station at Wells he spent most of his time, when not being questioned, sitting on a narrow bed writing a draft for *The Story of a Norfolk Farm*. Jefferies, in comparison, enjoyed what can best be described as 'varied health' in his painfully short life.

Another difference, though shared by both writers, was what I can only term 'frustration'. It was inevitable that Henry Williamson's long and multi-faceted life should bring frustrations as well as successes but I would consider that many of the former were self-induced, at least initially, probably through romance or politics. Jefferies had one abiding frustration for much of his short life, one he couldn't beat, and that was ill health. Ironically it probably produced some of his most poignant and memorable writing but it did restrict his activities. Take, as one example, the sea and the importance it had for both writer. Williamson lived close to the sea, not just in the West Country, for much of his life. Jefferies had very often just to dream of it, though in *The Story of My Heart* it is a very real and powerful presence: 'I spoke to the sea: though so far, in my mind I saw it, green at the rim of the earth and blue in deeper ocean; I desired to have its strength, its mystery and glory.'<sup>28</sup> But most visits to the sea were very short, though he still managed, in *Nature Near London*, to produce a memorable account of 'The Breeze on Beachy Head' which is uppermost in my mind every time I go there, even though my search is primarily for butterflies:

These breadths draw out the soul; we feel that we have wider thoughts than we knew; the soul has been living, as it were, in a nutshell, all unaware of its own power, and now suddenly finds freedom in the sun and the sky. Straight, as if sawn down from turf to beach, the cliff shuts off the human world, for the sea knows no time and no era... A Roman trireme suddenly rounding the white edge-line of chalk, borne on wind and oar from the Isle of Wight towards the gray castle at Pevensey (already old in olden days) would not seem strange. What wonder would surprise us coming from the wonderful sea?<sup>29</sup>

The ultimate irony is that Jefferies eventually went to live by the sea, but for his health, and by then the view of it from the window of his rented house at Goring-on-Sea was a poor substitute for his previous long walks. One of his greatest essays, 'Hours of Spring' has the words 'High up against the grey cloud I hear the lark through the window singing, and each note falls into my heart like a knife.'<sup>30</sup> By then he was so weak that he had to dictate everything for his wife to write down.

What I am trying to do here is to show that Williamson, once established as a writer, had less need to be dependent on Jefferies. Perhaps one short but in my opinion very telling quote, can be used to support this view. In Chapter 2 of *The Pathway*, first published in 1928, Willie Maddison is talking to Mary about Richard Jefferies: 'You know, that man is not appreciated even by those who read him. I used to read him always, but I've gone beyond him now.'<sup>31</sup> The fictitious Maddison and the writer

Williamson are so closely connected that this may in reality be a factual statement from the writer. Nevertheless, Henry Williamson still espoused the Jefferies cause whenever possible, his most practical acknowledgement of his debt to Jefferies being when on the death of Samuel Looker he became President of the Richard Jefferies Society from 1965 to 1974. He died in 1977. Of the many fulsome tributes to his active championing of Jefferies in the Society's library are those of Edna Manning, who recollected that 'he gave everyone an impression of ease and enjoyment. He loved congeniality and friendship.'<sup>32</sup>

In his comments on Jefferies' works, Williamson showed that he possessed a deep insight into the 'art of the master'. In his introduction to *Wild Life in a Southern County* he wrote that 'like all men of genius, Jefferies had extraordinary sight and his style was his sight returning from his memory into words.'<sup>33</sup> This was a penetrating analysis of just how Jefferies was able to write the powerful and mature late essays such as 'My Old Village' and 'Hours of Spring' while in such physical pain and also physically divorced from the context. Much of his analysis of Jefferies was also relevant to Williamson himself. Moving forward to the *Radio Times* of 22 February 2003, quoted in the *Henry Williamson Journal*, an interviewer compiling a series about the First World War remarked that Williamson was 'an amazing interviewee' - 'He had noticed every little detail' - and, like Jefferies, remembered and recorded it. Williamson was also aware of his own power as a writer, again relating this to Jefferies and others he admired. In *The Sun in the Sands*, he wrote: 'In myself, I believed, was a power and vision and truth clearer than in any other writer in the world, except in Richard Jefferies, William Blake and Francis Thompson.'<sup>34</sup> One is tempted to add: 'Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel' (Matthew 5:15).

I would like now to spend some time looking at the 1937 Selection of Jefferies Works edited by Williamson: a labour of love, and certainly a more positive and constructive Introduction compared to that of his friend Elwin, who has already been mentioned. My only reservations are the linking of Hitler and Jefferies, in comments on *The Story of My Heart* and he could hardly be criticised, as early as 1937, for his belief that Jefferies' readers could be split into two groups, those appreciating his early more imaginative but immature style and those appreciative of his later, mature writing. There is definitely now a third class of reader, and I would speculate that this extra dimension of Jefferies appeal may well eventually elevate him to his proper position in our literary heritage. Jefferies was, far more than Williamson, a visionary environmentalist, a prophet akin to organisations like Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace: not a direct activist but a man acutely aware of his race and its positive or negative impact upon the earth. The best of many examples can be found in *The Gamekeeper at Home*, first published in 1878. Jefferies' Keeper speaks, and Jefferies himself comments, on the value of an outdoor life to good health:

It's indoors, sir, as kills half the people; being indoors three parts of the day, and next to that taking too much drink and vittals ... There's always a smell from trees, dead or living - I could tell what wood a log was in the dark by my nose; and the air is better where the

woods be. The ladies up in the great house sometimes goes out into the fir plantations - the turpentine scents strong, you see - and they say it's good for the chest; but, bless you, you must live in it.<sup>35</sup>

There isn't time to list all the environmental issues covered, but to mention just two others, first the detrimental effect of wire fences replacing hedges and the value of dead wood as a habitat; Jefferies was probably the first to recognise and record this. This selection is Henry Williamson's own tribute to the man who changed his life at a crucial moment. Not only is there a full Introduction, but also an added personal comment prefacing each selection. From these I have selected a few short quotes. Short because you've already had to listen to many longer quotes but, more importantly, because they demonstrate not just the genuine appreciation and respect Williamson had for Jefferies but also his deep knowledge of the relevant texts: *Hodge and His Masters*: 'A brilliant re-creation of the human countryside ... Shallow critics have said that Jefferies is without humour; such people have never read his books'. *Round About a Great Estate*: 'Prose passages often glowing with the perceptions of his inner mind; with the light of the future'. *Bevis*: 'There is nothing in English literature to equal it, unless it be Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*'. *The Open Air*: 'Like D H Lawrence, sapped by the same disease, he was the more restless as tubercle patches in his body increased. And as he suffered, so his writing became deeper and clearer. The ancient sunlight of his youth now flowed with the present sunshine'.<sup>36</sup> He also had enough respect for Jefferies, and the reader, to include selections from earlier less successful works such as *The Scarlet Shawl*. A quote from the Epilogue concludes this study and concisely articulates Henry Williamson's debt to Richard Jefferies:

You fought the three giants of disease, despair and poverty; and in this fight you destroyed yourself, that others might live. The fight is not over; it is a fight continuing down the light years of the human imagination. I could not write a book about you, a prophet whose testimony and fate is everywhere in your own works. May these fragments bring you to the many minds who today most sorely need to know your way of life.<sup>37</sup>

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# Book Review

HENRY WILLIAMSON: A Bibliography, by Hugoe Matthews.  
*Halsgrove, 2004; pp 232; £29.95. ISBN 1-84114-364-2.*

'Monumental' is a deserving description of the well compiled, conventional bibliography; and monumental indeed was *Richard Jefferies: A Bibliographical Study* (Scolar Press, 1993) by George Miller and Hugoe Matthews. With *Henry Williamson: A Bibliography*, Hugoe Matthews set out to produce a different species of bibliography. This volume, compiled with the same industry, meticulousness and scholarship devoted to the Jefferies' study, was conceived and nurtured as a 'book spotter's guide' to the works of Henry Williamson. Its convenient size will allow it to be taken to book fairs and bookshops, where potential purchasers can check out the true nature of the wares on display. Packed within this small volume there appears to be everything there is to know about different editions and impressions of Williamson's work, yet an additional aim of the author is to inspire others to further research.

The previous Williamson bibliography of any scholarship had been compiled by Waveney Girvan, and published in 1931. At that time, fewer than a third of Williamson's books had been published, together with a mere handful of his vast output of newspaper and magazine articles. By the 1960s it was clear that the situation needed urgent redress. Stephen Clarke of Clearwater Books, a founder member of the Henry Williamson Society and for many years the leading specialist dealer in Henry Williamson, contemplated an updated bibliography. At the time, he was undoubtedly the best qualified to undertake the task, but business commitments precluded his devoting the necessary time.

Hugoe Matthews will be well known to members of the Richard Jefferies Society. He has been a member for nearly 40 years, and inspired the introduction of the Society's annual journal, working closely with Lady Treitel on its publication in the early years. A true polymath, Hugoe had been a member of the Provincial Booksellers Fairs Association whilst still a Consultant Surgeon. He knew Stephen Clarke well, and their many discussions about the works of Williamson motivated Hugoe to take over the mantle of bibliographer. Had he not, it is almost certain that an authoritative bibliography would never have appeared.

Hugoe knew what he wanted to produce, viz. an affordable, 'spotter's guide', and he spent two or three years thinking how to present the data and setting himself boundaries. A further three years were devoted to data collection and compilation, whilst observing his defined boundaries. The task was immense. Williamson had published 53 books, and had repeatedly revised them, even the novels. He had contributed hundreds of articles to newspapers and magazines.

The Introduction to the bibliography provides a succinct and clear description of the manner in which entries are presented, together with an explanation of abbreviations, cross-referencing, etc. There follow five Sections, covering Williamson's books and pamphlets, books edited or with a contribution by him, his contributions to periodicals, works about him, and finally his works' illustrators, editors etc. The first Section is necessarily the longest and the most comprehensive. The owner of even a modest library of Williamson's work will acquire a higher level of understanding of his collection by perusing the entries in this Section. (The exercise can be sobering. I have discovered that some of my first editions are 'merely' second issues, and one or two are first issues that were sold with second issue dust jackets!) This Section includes details of the posthumous collections of items of Williamson's work published by the Henry Williamson Society. These have appeared in 15 volumes during the past 20 years. They present works not otherwise easily accessible, and have been collected and edited by John Gregory.

The bibliophil and bibliomaniac will learn a great deal more about books in general by browsing this bibliography. Admirers of Henry Williamson's work will be fascinated by what they discover. It will become an essential addition to the library of any serious collector of Williamson, and should become a necessary tool for book dealers. An omission or two from a work of this magnitude is inevitable, but is neither here nor there in an evaluation of overall worth. In a recent note to a colleague, I described Hugoe's book as a 'gem'. It is a gem - a valuable gem with an amazingly moderate price.

It is a sad duty to report Stephen Clarke's recent tragic and untimely death. As he had done so much to motivate and encourage Hugoe, it is especially sad that Stephen died less than four weeks before the book's publication. The bibliography has proved to be a fitting memorial.

*A J Boakes*

1876 Publication of fourth Untimely Meditation: Richard Wagner in Bayreuth . Attends first Bayreuth festival (July) . Granted one-year leave of absence from the university.Â Even if we take the completion of the longer books, Beyond Good and Evil and On the Genealogy of Morals, before his final productive year of 1888 as evidence that material left unused which was prior to or contemporaneous with the composition of these books was therefore abandoned, this accounts for at most a portion of the material here; well.