

## LITERATURE AND THE ECOLOGICAL IMAGINATION: RICHARD JEFFERIES AND D. H. LAWRENCE

Rebecca Welshman  
(University of Exeter)

### *Abstract*

This paper suggests that early twentieth-century representations of the pastoral were informed by late nineteenth-century environmentalism. Richard Jefferies, Victorian author and journalist, was one of the earliest proponents of an ecological movement that warned against humans losing connection with nature. Jefferies' spiritual autobiography, *The Story of my Heart*, published in 1883, attempted to defy the passive response to late-Victorian ecological ignorance and boldly anticipated the more dynamic literary forms of the Modernist era. Although Jefferies' expression of the relationship between the psyche and the natural world has been labelled as 'pantheistic', 'pretentious' and a 'failure', a similar strain of dramatic self-consciousness is recognisable in the work of early Modern authors. D. H. Lawrence stated that he 'didn't like' *The Story of My Heart*. However, close readings of passages from the autobiography, and from Jefferies' post-apocalyptic novel *After London* (1885) compared with close readings from Lawrence's *The Rainbow* (1915) highlight latent affinities between the late work of Jefferies and the work of D. H. Lawrence. These affinities include imaginative connections between the psyche and the natural world—which afforded partial consolation for the post-Romantic loss of equilibrium between man and nature, and the potential implications of ecological imbalance for the relationship between man and woman—in particular the struggle for individual identity within an increasingly industrial environment. Considering these affinities in the context of the broader literary transition between late-nineteenth century realism and the more reactionary genres of the early twentieth century, this paper concludes that continuity between late nineteenth-century environmentalism and early modernist ecological narratives afforded a more imaginative understanding of the relationship between the self and the natural world.

The term 'ecology' was first used in 1866 by biologist and philosopher Professor Ernst Haeckel in *General Morphology*. Haeckel, described in the *Saturday Review* in 1931 as 'the renowned leader of the materialistic school of thought',<sup>1</sup> based 'ecology' on the classical Greek words *oikos*, meaning 'household or homestead,' and *logos*, meaning 'study'. Ecologist Stanley Dodson has noted that in his definition Haeckel publicised the concept of the 'economy of nature' discussed by Darwin in *On the Origin of Species*.<sup>2</sup> Darwin suggested that nature seemed to be an orderly, well-regulated system of interactions between plants, animals, and their environment, and

---

<sup>1</sup> Anonymous, 'The Love Letters of Ernst Haeckel', *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, 151:3923 (1931:Jan. 3), 30-3 (p. 30).

<sup>2</sup> *Ecology*, ed. by Stanley Dodson and others (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 2.

that the appearance of organisation was the result of a natural process of evolution based on a struggle for existence by each individual organism.<sup>3</sup> Haeckel defined ecology as:

The economy of nature—the investigation of the total relations of the animal both to its inorganic and its organic environment; including, above all, its friendly and inimical relations with those animals and plants with which it comes directly or indirectly into contact—in a word, ecology is the study of all those complex interrelations referred to by Darwin as the conditions of the struggle for existence.<sup>4</sup>

Ten years after Haeckel coined the term 'ecology' a revolution was ongoing in rural England. The arrival of new agricultural machinery altered ways of life which had remained untouched for centuries. Mechanised steam engines promised to increase yield and reduce labour, but polluted the air with noise and fumes. The implications of these practical changes for a society seeking to secure itself in the aftermath of a 'great and sudden revolution' in the way in which Victorians perceived the history of the world,<sup>5</sup> was documented by journalists and fiction writers. One of the most consistent and insightful records of this acute period of change was Richard Jefferies who between 1874 and 1887 contributed hundreds of pastoral essays to a range of leading periodicals including *Chambers's Journal*, *Fraser's Magazine*, *Longman's*, *The Examiner*, and the *National Review*. In chronicling the implications of change on man's relationship with the environment, Jefferies' pastoral representations became a rich holding ground for experiments in early modern thought.

Brian Morris, in *Richard Jefferies and the Ecological Vision* (2006), identifies Jefferies as a pioneer environmentalist, and discusses, among other things, his interest in the preservation of the rural environment and his observations of insect life. Although an accurate account of Jefferies's observations, Morris's work fails fully to acknowledge the deep symbolism employed in Jefferies' nature journalism from 1882 and 1887, which sought to express natural history as philosophy. Despite Jefferies's attempts to sow seeds of modern thought—which sought to expand the parameters set by mid-Victorian values—the latent crossovers of his work with Lawrence's writing,

---

<sup>3</sup> Kevin Padian, in *Nature* 451 (February, 2008), notes that Darwin's work is behind many of the ideas in ecology. Padian observes that the word 'ecology' was not known in Darwin's time, and that Darwin's 'the economy of nature' caused the formerly 'divinely ordained balance of nature' to become 'the autocatalytic war of nature.' The word 'ecology' was a virtual neologism at this time and had not yet been popularised, however it is likely that Darwin, considering his profession, would have been aware of the term during his lifetime (pp. 632-634).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> The physician Charles Murchison wrote in *Paleontological memoirs and notes* (London: Hardwicke, 1868) of the 'great and sudden revolution' that was occurring in England during the late nineteenth century (p. 486).

and the relationship between the two writers has been overlooked. Like Lawrence, Jefferies was not limited to delineating rural England but represented a broad spectrum of life—from labouring classes to London high society. Like Jefferies, Lawrence sought to address Victorian ideas with modern solutions, recognising that the gradual conscious response to a radically changing society, that had characterised the mid nineteenth century, needed to accelerate in order to keep up. Roger Ebbatson, in *The Evolutionary Self*, writes that Lawrence's 'cultivation of the circle of thought' and the 'laborious growth' of *The Rainbow* are agents of change which contribute to achieving a more complete 'unit of consciousness'.<sup>6</sup> Both Jefferies and Lawrence recognise the emotional implications of the 'struggle for existence' and offer new ways to think about how tensions between the significance of the individual and the race of humanity as a whole might be resolved. Jefferies, also an experimenter in fiction, sought to imbue late-Victorian realism with an early modern dimension, exploring meeting places between the tangible and the unknown. Through the employment of a more radical and controversial mode of expression Lawrence nurtured and grew these early modern beginnings into his individual version of Modernity, thus maintaining essential affinities with his predecessors.

Jefferies's early work is characterised by country books such as *The Gamekeeper at Home*, first serialised in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1878, and articles on agricultural subjects, including 'An English Homestead' in *Fraser's Magazine* (1876). Both the article and the serial, written in an acute documentary style, explore the relationship of the landowner or agricultural worker to their environment. The human struggle for individual existence within a dynamic social and natural order was to become a theme of his work during the 1880s. In an article titled 'Just before Winter', published in *Chambers's Journal* in December 1886, Jefferies's observations of gypsies in the natural environment identify a more simple, less regulated form of existence than the organisation of civilised late nineteenth century society. He writes that 'the gipsy loves the crescent moon, the evening star, the clatter of the fern-owl, the beetle's hum. He was born on the earth in the tent, and he has lived like a species of human wild animal ever since.'<sup>7</sup> For Jefferies, the relationship between man and the natural world was not wholly dependent upon biologically determined impulses or inclinations, but upon a deeper, more soulful exchange between the mind of man and the cadence of natural surroundings. He wrote in the knowledge that the gradual relationship with the land, which mankind had built up over centuries, was in the process of being disassembled and rebuilt within in the space of fifty years. In *On the Origin of Species* Darwin refers to 'varying, and insensible changes' which are 'slowly and unconsciously accumulated': Darwin's observations of 'slow action' and 'the slow and successive appearance of new species' had made visible a grander scale of

---

<sup>6</sup> Roger Ebbatson, *The Evolutionary Self: Hardy, Forster, Lawrence*. (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1982), p. 96.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Jefferies, 'Just before Winter', *Chambers's Journal* (December 1886), pp. 801-4 (p. 801).

existence in which the individual had to find a place.<sup>8</sup> The form of Victorian realism struggled to accommodate this new direction in thought and was subject to broadening experiments in fiction, often rejected by the markets of the time, but which are now receiving their due scholarly attention.<sup>9</sup> Unlike many of his contemporaries, Jefferies did not believe that Darwin's theory of natural selection could fully explain the complexities of the relationship between mankind and the natural world. In his essay 'The Prodigality of Nature and the Niggardliness of Man' he directly contradicts Darwin's theory of natural economy, stating that 'there is no *enough* in nature. It is one vast prodigality [...] There is no economy: it is all one immense extravagance [...] I would it could be introduced into our human life.'<sup>10</sup> Jefferies perceived that the mind of man was entirely separate, and natural selection alone seemed an insufficient explanation for the existence of life.

In 1883 Jefferies wrote a spiritual autobiography about the relationship between thought and the natural world; an account of 'the successive stages of emotion and thought through which [he] passed [...] to enter upon a larger series of ideas than those which have occupied the brain of man so many centuries.'<sup>11</sup> In the book, Jefferies recognised the evolution of his own thought—beginning at age 17—but sought to transcend what Darwin termed the 'slow succession of stages', and to break through into new spheres of thought, using short staccato sentences and soulful emotive language. However, Jefferies's desire that 'thought must yet grow larger' was ultimately held back by the lack of a suitable form to express it.

In *The Story of My Heart* Jefferies explores in detail the connections between mind and environment, and seeks to adopt some of the physical qualities of nature in order to achieve a stronger physique and fuller experience of life. His observations of the individual life progressed from Haeckel's idea of the 'homestead' to the larger idea of man at home on the earth. He describes ascending Liddington Hill, to a prehistoric fort, where he lay beneath the sun, 'utterly alone with the sun and the earth'—as if he could 'hear the great earth speaking' to him.<sup>12</sup> The activity of walking in a natural environment clears the mind of 'the heaviness accumulated at home.' Once away from the 'familiar everyday scene' the mind is free to imagine how material qualities of the

---

<sup>8</sup> Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, ed. Gillian Beer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 32-5, p. 389, p. 252 respectively.

<sup>9</sup> See for example, Jefferies' 1884 novel *The Dewy Morn*, republished for the first time since in 2009, which Q. D. Leavis recognised as one of the earliest modern novels. (Q. D. Leavis, 'Lives and Works of Richard Jefferies', *Scrutiny*, VI (March 1938), p. 445 (In Richard Jefferies, *The Dewy Morn*, (Oxford: Petton Books, 2009), p. xxvi).

<sup>10</sup> Richard Jefferies, 'The Prodigality of Nature and the Niggardliness of Man', in *The Old House at Coate: And Other Hitherto Unpublished Essays*, ed. Samuel J. Looker (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1948), p. 68.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Jefferies, *The Story of My Heart: My Autobiography*. (Portland, ME: Thomas B. Mosher, 1905), p. xi.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

landscape might imbue the body with greater strength. Within the ancient setting, Jefferies imagines back to 'the forest-days' when the warrior interred there in a tumulus once 'hurled the spear' and 'shot with the bow', sensing the warrior's existence 'the same' as his own. In 'Darwin and the Uses of Extinction', Gillian Beer quotes the same passage from *The Story of My Heart* to support her suggestion that the concept of extinction was, for the Victorians, coupled with the idea of an absolute mortality, and that in contemporary secular society people have 'very contracted life spans compared with Victorian believers':

Far fewer could now share Jefferies's assurance of the naturalness of the immortal soul, though he well pinpoints the fundamental resistance of the living being to imagining extinction. The loss of belief in a personal eternity shifts the time-scale of human fears and brings everything within the single life span.<sup>13</sup>

Beer speaks of the 'terror of extinction' facing contemporary societies; a fear only just being realised in the late nineteenth century. What she terms the 'bring[ing] within the single life span' of existential fears was keenly felt by Jefferies who in the autobiography acknowledges *fin-de-siècle* disillusionment, while at the same time struggles to maintain his hope in something existing beyond the material world. Within this narrative of imaginative retrospect Jefferies visualises what contemporary expert in ecology, Eric Zencey, terms a prehistoric 'state of ecological grace',<sup>14</sup> which contrasts with the ecological uncertainty of industrialised Victorian England. Jefferies's ecological imagination conceives of a vision of evolution wherein hunters and gatherers once lived in accordance with nature, in what Zencey identifies as a tribal and pre-literate, yet 'rich and participatory culture', whose population and means of subsistence did not threaten the planet's capacity to support them.<sup>15</sup>

When D. H. Lawrence read *The Story of My Heart*, he wrote in a letter to Edward Garnett that '[he didn't] like' the book due to its openness and betrayal of the author's 'deeply personal' thoughts and feelings.<sup>16</sup> It was perhaps the spiritual and emotional indulgence of the book that Lawrence also found problematic, coupled with the idea that Jefferies was unable to clearly express what he meant by a 'fourth idea' or a new territory of the mind. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* (1911) has similar strains of emotional intensity and ambition to *The Story of My Heart*, yet presents them in a more accessible form. Kate Flint notes that the historical breadth of *The*

---

<sup>13</sup> Gillian Beer, 'Darwin and the Uses of Extinction', *Victorian Studies*, 51 (2009), 321-331 (p. 326).

<sup>14</sup> Eric Zencey, 'Apocalypse and Ecology', *The North American Review*, Vol. 273, No 2 (Jun., 1988), 54.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> D. H. Lawrence in a letter to Edward Garnett, 21<sup>st</sup> of Jan, 1912, in *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence* (London: William Heinemann, 1932), p. 21.

*Rainbow*, covering a period of sixty five years from 1840 to 1905, chronicles the emergence of the modern, whereby 'the novel, social and personal identities are shown to be irrevocably entangled with the environment and opportunities offered by one's time.'<sup>17</sup> Flint also notes that Lawrence 'counterpoints his sharp sense of local history, and the forces which shape each individual, with a search for values which are more transcendent of particular time and space,'<sup>18</sup> highlighting his ambition to identify the complexities that shape an individual's relation to his or her immediate environment. In the book, the personal and domestic implications of an increasingly industrialised England are used to negotiate moral consciousness—an increasingly significant component of early twentieth-century ecology that constituted making the right choices about how mankind behaved towards the environment.

For Lawrence's heroine Ursula Brangwen, the 'struggle for existence' is an emotional one. Insight into a more complicated understanding of the position of herself in the world occurs when she is a young woman, engaged to the Polish Anton Skrebensky. They kiss with 'subtle, instinctive economy [...] knowing subconsciously that the last [is] coming.' Beneath an oak tree at night Ursula experiences a new dimension, away from 'the undercurrent of darkness' and her parents' lack of understanding:

They had come down the lane towards Beldover, down to the valley. They were at the end of their kisses, and there was the silence between them. They stood as at the edge of a cliff, with a great darkness beneath.<sup>19</sup>

'At home'—in the context of Haeckel's definition of ecology—the observations of Ursula's relationship with Skrebensky by her family are inaccurate. Ursula's desire to experience more than the 'social imposition' of the time allowed goes unnoticed; they believe her to be 'like any other girl who is more or less courted by a man'. It is only outside the domestic environment, within the protective 'circle' of the oak tree, where the couple, referred to as 'two creatures', experience temporary suspension of moral and social expectations. Lawrence explores the possibilities of life on 'the edge' of the industrialised world where the noise and sight of the mine—the lights and the 'clink-clink-clink'—which by day are intrusive, are 'below', 'far-off'; and 'tiny'. Initiated into a new micro environment, contained by the presence of the ancient oak, Ursula discovers a new imaginative territory; an unmapped 'original' state. Ursula's fearless exploration into 'the dark fields of immortality' is a bolder delivery of Jefferies's intimation in *The Story of My Heart* of a new thought-world, imagined through what he calls the 'star hollow' - where the isolated individual, seeking to transcend the known, stands on the threshold of new imaginative terrain. Jefferies imagines there

---

<sup>17</sup> D. H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow*, ed. Kate Flint (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. vii.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p. vii.

<sup>19</sup> *The Rainbow*, pp. 448-9.

being nothing between him and space: 'this is the verge of a gulf, and a tangent from my feet goes straight unchecked into the unknown.' He describes being on 'the edge of the abyss as much as if the earth were cut away in a sheer fall of eight thousand miles to the sky beneath, thence a hollow to the stars.'<sup>20</sup> In comparison, Lawrence was more content with temporary insight—Ursula is prepared to return to the ordinary world—whereas Jefferies sought desperately to sustain his perception of something beyond it: 'the vast hollow yonder makes me feel that the mystery is here. I, who am here on the verge, standing on the margin of the sky, am in the mystery itself.'

In *The Dewy Morn*, set during the height of agricultural change in the 1870s, Jefferies experiments with the idea of the unconventional heroine, Felise, being immune to moral judgement, and suggests that her nymph-like qualities and imaginative engagement with the natural world can transcend the implications of improper conduct. It is beneath a 'solitary beech' where the two lovers first meet, and into the beech bark that Felise carves Martial Barnard's initials. When the couple become engaged, a scene beneath a chestnut tree suggests balance between qualities of the natural environment and the characters' thoughts and feelings:

So overcome was he with the violence of his emotion that instead of supporting her, she supported him. Her physical exhaustion disappeared quickly; his moral excitement could not subside. She held his head upon her breast; she soothed him; she whispered gently; her strong arms were about him.

Once again they knew no Time. The shadow of the chestnut-tree swung slowly round; the doves came to the wood from the stubble; a blue kingfisher past, going to the brook; the gleaners rested in the field.<sup>21</sup>

Here the calmness of a summer's day is the antithesis to the 'indomitable' oak in the darkness of Lawrence's narrative. This does not however detract from the affinities between the two novels. In both accounts, the couples need the natural world to transcend the circumstances of their ordinary life, and in both accounts time subsides while love affords new emotional territory. Jefferies perceived the interplay between the psyche and the calm activity of the summer landscape to facilitate a progressive emotional freedom. Lawrence took this further because Modernity left him with no choice—'they could not turn back to the world—they could not.'

For Lawrence, industrialisation—although threatening to encroach on the territory of the mind – does not necessarily compromise man's relationship with the environment. In *The Dewy Morn*, Jefferies suggests that the mechanisation of

---

<sup>20</sup> *The Story of My Heart*, p. 83.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, p. 279.

agriculture need not threaten the character of the landscape, and perceives humane qualities in mechanic inventions:

From afar came the hum of a threshing-machine, winnowing out the fresh corn from the ear. A hum that sank to a mournful note and rose again—a curve of sound. There is something inarticulately human in the cry of the threshing-machine. Wheat and bread—labour and life—the past of the sowing, the future of the uncertain autumn, hazy and deepening into the gloom of winter. In the glow, and light, and heat of to-day, forget not that the leaves shall fall and the stubble be beaten by the rains and whitened by the snow; yet hope on, because the sunlight and the flowers shall assuredly succeed again. Inarticulately expressing the meaning of the years and the rise and fall of time, the low hum stretches itself across the wide fields of grain.<sup>22</sup>

For Jefferies, mechanisation did not necessarily mean loss of identity or tradition. Rather, for agriculture to progress it was necessary to embrace designs which eased the load of human labour and increased the yield of crops. The divide between the natural and the mechanical was perhaps not so great—the design of the machine was, after all, a product of the human mind—and thus the noise of the machine 'stretches itself' across the fields as might a rumble of thunder or a gust of wind. However, the mechanical drone, akin to 'the rise and fall of time', carries an intrinsic warning that although the seasonal rhythms of nature will remain, industrial progress has the potential to irrevocably alter the relationship between humans and the landscape. The sound is 'inarticulate'—a 'mournful [...] human [...] cry'—suggesting it will be the human race that is most at risk from ecological imbalance while the 'flowers will assuredly succeed again.' Jefferies explored this idea further in his 1885 novel, *After London*, which chronicles life after ecological disaster in Britain. The earth around London becomes 'unctuous and slimy, like a thick oil', producing toxic emanations which are of no use to man. Jefferies likens the loss of communication between people, at the very heart of society, to a machine that can no longer function:

The cunning artificers of the cities all departed [...] Communication between one place and another was absolutely cut off, and if one perchance did recollect something that might have been of use, he could not confer with another who knew the other part, and thus between them reconstruct the machine.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 240-41.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Jefferies, *After London*, (Fairford, Gloucestershire: Echo Library, 2007), p. 15.

The Victorian trust in the industrial machine, whereby the component parts work together to contribute to the movement of the whole, no longer holds. The human race is 'disjointed', and the reciprocal relationship between humans and the environment has been lost. *After London* foresees that the machine of human society needs to be rethought and repositioned in accordance with the ideals of a new modern era. The hero Felix, based on Jefferies, seeks to create a new existence for himself in a world that has yet to recover from the years of unchecked environmental violation. With his wife Aurora, who helps found a new religion from 'scraps' of manuscript which survive the social and ecological collapse, the couple find their own balance within an unbalanced world.

Like Jefferies, D. H. Lawrence did not accept that industrial activity was necessarily going to result in ongoing ecological problems and had faith in the human mind to regain the state of balance, however hard it might be. The visionary conclusion of *The Rainbow* uses the metaphor of spring to denote Ursula's reawakening after the miscarriage of her child and the ending of her relationship with Skrebensky. Her emotional landscape has been wiped out; from her bedroom window she searches for signs of hope in the men and women who walk past. Lawrence writes of 'a dry, brittle, terrible corruption spreading over the face of the land' and upon the appearance of a rainbow Ursula sees the 'old, brittle corruption of houses and factories swept away' in the budding of a 'new germination'. Lawrence addresses the late-Victorian anxiety that the future was to be shaped by the dynamic activity of man alone, without omnipotent guidance, echoing an unpublished note in Jefferies's manuscripts, that 'if God does nothing then he is dead'.<sup>24</sup> Lawrence asserts the liberatory promise of modernism, the hope of new Utopian forms, not just in literature but in the built environment too:

And the rainbow stood on the earth. She knew that the sordid people who crept hard-scaled and separate on the face of the world's corruption were living still, that the rainbow was arched in their blood and would quiver to life in their spirit, that they would cast off their horny covering of disintegration, that new, clean, naked bodies would issue to a new germination, to a new growth, rising to the light and the wind and the clean rain of heaven. She saw in the rainbow the earth's new architecture, the old, brittle corruption of houses and factories swept away, the world built up in a living fabric of Truth, fitting to the overarching heaven.<sup>25</sup>

The rainbow, like the oak tree, is an 'indomitable' and enduring symbol of the natural rhythms which mankind cannot control. Balance between humans and the

---

<sup>24</sup> London, British Library, MS Richard Jefferies 58816, vol. XIV.

<sup>25</sup> *The Rainbow*, pp. 493-4.

environment may yet have the potential to be restored, if only through experiencing the collapse of all that has gone before and the emergence as a collective 'new growth' ignorant of, and yet receptive to, the future.

In 1886, in one of Richard Jefferies's last essays, 'Hours of Spring', written when he was dying from tuberculosis, the concept of rebirth is tangibly embraced, although tinged with regret at his own vulnerability. Writing in the knowledge of his imminent death, Jefferies laments the ease with which spring continues, without him to record its phases. He writes: 'I thought myself so much to the earliest leaf and the first meadow orchis [...] For they were so much to me, I had come to feel that I was as much in return to them,' and refers to '*the old, old error: I love the earth, therefore the earth loves me.*' Outside his window, dark clouds which he calls 'messengers'—go drifting by:

After a time there will be a rainbow. Through the bars of my prison I can see the catkins thick and sallow-grey on the willows across the field, visible even at that distance; so great the change in a few days, the hand of spring grows firm and takes a strong grasp of the hedges. My prison bars are but a sixteenth of an inch thick; I could snap them with a fillip—only the windowpane to me as impenetrable as the twenty-foot Tower of London. A cart has just gone past bearing a strange load among the carts of spring; they are talking of poling the hops. In it there sat an old man, with the fixed stare, the animal-like eye, of extreme old age; he is over ninety. About him there were some few chairs and articles of furniture, and he was propped against a bed. He was being moved – literally carted—to another house, not home, and he said he could not go without his bed; he had slept on it for seventy-three years. Last Sunday his son—himself old—was carted to the churchyard, as is the country custom, in an open van; today the father, still living, goes to what will be to him a strange land. His home is broken up—he will potter no more with maize for the chicken; the gorse hedges will become solid walls of golden bloom, but there will never again be a spring for him. It is very hard, is it not, at ninety? It is not the tyranny of any one that has done it; it is the tyranny of circumstance, the lot of man. [...] A stranger, I see, is already digging the old man's garden.<sup>26</sup>

Unlike Ursula's observations from her sickroom, the appearance of the rainbow is not a Biblical symbol, but represents a more ambiguous lifecycle in which one generation does not necessarily succeed the next; where loss, or death itself, like the 'dark

---

<sup>26</sup> Richard Jefferies, 'Hours of Spring', *Field and Hedgerow* (London: Longmans Green and Co., 1892), pp. 1-18 (pp. 5-17).

patches' of the clouds which drift past can spontaneously obscure the hope of the living. The clouds—as 'spots of ink' and 'messengers'—herald a warning of impending change that throws a blanket of inertia upon the inquisitive mind: what Thomas Hardy termed in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) 'the ache of Modernism'. Jefferies, writing in the tradition of late-Victorian realism, was just learning how to leave behind the significance of the individual life—but was unable to fully embrace the letting go of the self that characterised Lawrence's thought-experiments. Jefferies the invalid watches the disassembling of the elder man's domestic security—his home is 'broken up'—while the natural growth around continues indifferently, and the gorse will bloom in a 'solid wall'. The growth of spring, likened to a 'hand' that 'takes a strong grasp of the hedges', is implicitly compared to the life of man, and man is weaker. As in the concluding scene of *The Rainbow*, the perspective from a window affords momentary transcendence from the restrictions imposed upon the psyche by the threat of a progressive world ('so great the change in a few days'). The human instinct to stake claim to a particular piece of land and stay there for the duration of a life is the antithesis to the spontaneous replenishment of spring. The aged agricultural worker, with his 'animal-like eye', is a unique 'species' carried along on a cart, away from his only home, like an agricultural commodity. He survives—despite the competition of younger men who succeed him—but cannot defend his patch of ground so that 'a stranger [...] is already digging [his] garden.' The old man is representative of the displacement that characterised the Victorian era: he is borne along on a current of change beyond his control, towards a 'strange land'; one that D. H. Lawrence was not afraid to inhabit.

Lawrence sought to develop these seeds of modern thought and expand consciousness, thus continuing Jefferies's effort to break the mould set by the Victorians; what he called in his *Study of Thomas Hardy* 'heaving into uncreated space ... actually living, becoming himself.'<sup>27</sup> The apocalyptic end to *Women in Love*, the sequel to *The Rainbow*, seeks to respond to the late-Victorian anxiety that the human race might face extinction by its inability to restore the environment. But more importantly, the book as a whole develops the idea of adaptation to survive. Extinction through death does not necessarily mean annihilation, and therefore the desire is not as desperate as Jefferies's in *The Story of My Heart*. When Ursula and Birkin face the loss of their close friend Gerald after a skiing accident in the Alps, Lawrence strips away the abundance of nature to explore the implications of an irretrievable past in a colder, more hostile environment. When Birkin ascends the snowy slopes, in 'greyness and stillness', to find the spot where Gerald died, he imagines 'the timeless creative mystery' whereby new species soon come to replace the old. Lawrence was not afraid of qualifying what the late-Victorians had begun to acknowledge. The spiritual progress that Jefferies spoke of in *The Story of My Heart*,

---

<sup>27</sup> D. H. Lawrence, *Study of Thomas Hardy and other essays* ed. by Bruce Steele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 41.

what he termed the 'slow continual rise', Lawrence sought to accelerate through the catalyst of modernism. Modern imaginative thought required a repositioning of the self - the transplanting of the Victorian transcendent ideal outside the arena of domestic realism: a process that had already begun in the late nineteenth century. Lawrence's frozen ending to *Women in Love*, one of his most epic novels, allows for the suspension of time. Even amidst the frozen wastes, Lawrence reassures that the end of a race does not mean the end of life itself. The irreconcilable difference between the mind of man that tires, ages, and eventually dies, and the 'inexhaustible' replenishment of the natural environment—what Jefferies referred to as 'divine chaos'—Lawrence explains as 'the game' that '[is] never up'. Within this conception of natural time that manifests itself in cycles and shifts, ecological imbalance itself might be only a phase, far briefer than that of the human species. Like the passing blots of cloud in Jefferies's 'Hours of Spring' Lawrence freely imagines species to come and go; a late-Victorian concept couched in an early modern form yet retaining an essential affinity.

## Bibliography

- Anonymous, *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* 151.3923 (1931), 30
- Beer, Gillian, 'Darwin and the Uses of Extinction', *Victorian Studies* 51 (2009), 321-331
- Darwin, Charles, *On the Origin of Species*, ed. Gillian Beer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996)
- Dodson, Stanley, Allen, T.F.H., Carpenter, S.R., and Ives, A., (eds.) *Ecology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)
- Ebbatson, Roger, *The Evolutionary Self: Hardy, Forster, Lawrence* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1982)
- Jefferies, Richard, *The Dewy Morn* (Oxford: Petton Books, 2009)
- , *After London* (Fairford, Gloucestershire: Echo Library, 2007)
- , *The Old House at Coate and Other Hitherto Unpublished Essays*, ed. by Samuel J. Looker (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948)

- , *The Story of My Heart: My Autobiography* (Portland, ME: Thomas B. Mosher, 1905)
- , *Field and Hedgerow* (London: Longmans Green and Co., 1892)
- Lawrence, D.H, *The Rainbow*, ed. by Kate Flint (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997)
- , *Study of Thomas Hardy and other essays*, ed. by Bruce Steele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985)
- , *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence* (London: William Heinemann, 1932)
- Leavis, Q. D., 'Lives and Works of Richard Jefferies', *Scrutiny*, VI (March 1938)
- London, British Library, MS Richard Jefferies 58816, vol. XIV
- Morris, Brian, *Richard Jefferies and the Ecological Vision* (Bloomington, Indiana: Trafford Publishing, 2007)
- Murchison, Charles, *Paleontological memoirs and notes on the late Hugh Falconer (...) with a biographical sketch of the author. Vol. II. Mastodon, elephant, rhinoceros, ossiferous caves, primeval man and his contemporaries* (London: Hardwicke, 1868)
- Padian, Kevin, *Nature* 451 (2008), 632-634
- Zencey, Eric, 'Apocalypse and Ecology', *The North American Review* 273.2 (1988), 54-57