A revised version of a lecture given to the Richard Jefferies Society at Swindon on Monday March 2nd 1981.

THE DAWN AND RICHARD JEFFERIES

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The subject was suggested by the beauty of the dawns observed while staying at the village of Chiseldon in North Wiltshire. The sun rose over or near Liddington Hill, according to season; and the splendour of the skies—the orange glow behind the dark green ridge of the downs, the clouds stippled rose and gold, the Turneresque scumblings like a dry brush charged with crimson purple drawn across the untranslatable blue—recalled how often the dawn featured in Jefferies' writings. It is found in *Round About a Great Estate*, *Greene Ferne Farm*, *Hodge and his Masters*, *Bevis*, *The Story of My Heart*, *The Dewy Morn*, and in early agricultural papers such as 'The Labourer's Daily Life' and later, more mystical pieces such as 'The Dawn'. The name of Felix Aquila's beloved Aurora in *After London* means dawn in Latin.

The list does not pretend to be complete but is enough for my purpose, which is to examine some of the passages in which the dawn occurs and to show how, among other things, the dawn became emblematic of Jefferies' mystical awakening, his entry into what Dr. R.M. Bucke termed 'cosmic consciousness', of which, however, he thought Jefferies attained only a partial and imperfect state.[1]

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The first example is from Chapter II of *Round About a Great Estate,* where Jefferies describes the farmhouse kitchen at Lucketts' Place. Here, in the summer afternoons, when the servants are out helping with the hay-making, Hilary Luckett's daughter Cicely comes to sit on an old ash log by the hearth and dream. The kitchen has a single small lattice window set in its thick walls and is a gloomy place except 'at one particular time', the early mornings of spring, when, as Cicely comes rushing down to breakfast, 'the tiny yellow panes' of the east-facing window are lit up and rosy with the rays of the rising sun.

> The beautiful light came through the elms of the rickyard, away from the ridge of the distant Down, and then for the first hour of the day the room was aglow. For quite two hundred years every visible sunrise had shone in at that window more or less, as the season changed and the sun rose to the north of east. Perhaps it was that sense of ancient homeliness that caused Cicely, without knowing why, to steal in there alone to dream, for nowhere else indoors could she have been so far away from the world of today.[2]

The dawn stands here for continuity and permanence. It is associated with the farmhouse kitchen, the oldest part of the house – 'the rest having

[1] Richard Maurice Bucke, M.D., *Cosmic Consciousness*, A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind [1901] (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1951), p.319.
[2] *Round About a Great Estate* [1880] (London: John Murray, 1937), pp.22-3.

been added to it in the course of years as the mode of life changed and increasing civilisation demanded more convenience and comfort'[3] – and represents a link with the past in a fast-changing world. The light shines through the tiny yellow and green panes, filling the room with its glow, as it has done every morning 'more or less' for the past two hundred years.

But the old order of the English countryside was breaking up; it was an age of unrest and upheaval, as Jefferies remarks in his preface, adding: 'In this book some notes have been made of the former state of things before it passes away entirely.'[4] *Round About a Great Estate* is full of country proverbs and saws, superstitions, legends, dialect words, weather-rhymes, herbal cures, and details of old handicrafts. Commented Edward Thomas:

> There is much masterly gossip… although the book is crammed with odds and ends of local lore, it is as easy to read as a hedge of hazel and oak and thorn and maple and dogwood and brier is to be walked along.[5]

Jefferies used the metaphor of a new light or illumination to describe the changes wrought by the advent of education in the out-of-the-way villages and hamlets. But he did not wish the old days back:

> My sympathies and hopes are with the light of the future, only I should like it to come from nature. The clock should be read by the sunshine, not the sun timed by the clock. The latter is indeed impossible, for though all the clocks in the world should declare the hour of dawn to be midnight, the sun will presently rise just the same.[6]

The dawn thus stands for contrasting ideas: for the light of continuity, the same sun rising and casting its glow into the farmhouse kitchen as it has done for the past two hundred years; and for the new light of education, which had helped dispel ignorance, but was also questioning and in many cases destroying traditional values. Jefferies himself was something of a Janus figure.[7] On the one hand, he looked back nostalgically on ways fast disappearing, his book an attempt to preserve them from oblivion; on the other, he was a progressive free-thinker who said that he would 'sooner fight in the foremost ranks of Time' than see the medieval days return.[8]

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A more mystical attitude to the dawn is evident in *Greene Ferne Farm.* The three chapters 'Evening', 'Night' and 'Dawn' that form the novel's centrepiece describe a harrowing night spent on the downs by Margaret Estcourt and her admirer Geoffrey Newton. Geoffrey has ridden over in the hope of meeting Margaret, who has been staying with her friend May Fisher and is making her way home to Greene Ferne Farm.

It is a summer evening; the shadows of horse and rider lengthen as Geoffrey rides along a hill ridge. His grey goes lame and he dismounts and waits in a fir-wood until Margaret comes by on her chestnut, singing an old

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[3] *ibid.,* p.20. Jefferies again refers to the antiquity of the kitchen in *Amaryllis at the Fair* (London: Quartet Books, 1980): 'Amaryllis had always been so fond of the kitchen—the oldest part of the house, two centuries at least.' (p.97)

[4] *ibid.,* vi-vii.

[5] Edward Thomas, *Richard Jefferies*, With an Introduction and Bibliography by Roland Gant [1909] (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), p.129 and p.133.

[6] *Round About a Great Estate*, vii.

[7] W.J. Keith, *The Rural Tradition*, A Study of the Non-Fiction Prose Writers of the English Countryside (University of Toronto Press, 1974), p.146: 'Jefferies looks forward as well as backward, and in so doing—in accepting, as it were, the role of Janus—he occupies a unique position in our rural prose literature, acting as both connector and divider.'

[8] 'Outside London', *The Open Air* [1885] (London: Chatto & Windus, 1904), p.218.

ballad. Embarrassed, she refuses Geoffrey's offer to escort her and canters off. Geoffrey follows on foot, running up and down the mist-filled hill-slopes to intercept her. The stars come out. Night falls. Geoffrey hears Margaret's voice calling in distress. She is lost. And so is he.

After unsuccessfully trying to find a landmark known as Moonlight Firs, they decide to follow the north star in the hope of reaching a road, but clouds blot out the stars. After a while they discover they have walked in a circle. Mysterious footsteps sound in the darkness. The night grows oppressive; a close, sulphurous atmosphere reigns, as before a storm. They almost stumble over the edge of an old chalk quarry. Finally they come to a prehistoric burial chamber, where they spend the night. The moon rises, 'a giant coppery moon, weird and magical'.[9] Margaret sleeps inside the cave while Geoffrey gallantly remains in the open, pillowing his head on a cushion of thyme.

He wakes to the sound of larks. To the east, rolling up from the valley coombes, a thick wall of mist rises to envelop him 'as the waters rolled over Pharaoh'. Then, above a distant ridge, he spies Venus, the morning-star, 'like molten silver, glowing with a lusciousness of light.'

> From the azure ether came the wind, filling his chest with the vigour of the young day.

There follows a passage of lyrical yet precise description:

> Who that has seen it can forget the wondrous beauty of the summer morning's sky? It is blue—it is sapphire— it is like the eye of a lovely woman. A rich purple shines through it; no painter ever approached the colour of it, no Titian or other, none from the beginning. Not even the golden flesh of Rubens' women, through the veins in whose limbs a sunlight pulses in lieu of blood shining behind the tissues, can equal the hues that glow behind the blue.
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> The East flamed out at last. Pencilled streaks of cloud high in the dome shone red. An orange light rose up and spread about the horizon, then turned crimson, and the upper edge of the sun's disk lifted itself over the hill. A swift beam of light shot like an arrow towards him, and the hawthorn bush obeyed with instant shadow: it passed beyond him over the green plain, up the ridge and away. The great orb, quivering with golden flames, looked forth upon the world.
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> He arose and involuntarily walked a few steps towards it, his heart swelling, the inner voice lifted. The larks sang with all their might, the swallows played high overhead. When he turned, Margaret had risen and came to meet him, blushing, and trying in vain to push back her hair, that had become slightly loosened. The breeze revelled in it.
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> 'Is it not beautiful?' she said, as they shook hands, looking round. He gazed into her eyes till the fringes drooped and hid them: then he kissed her hand. Her cheeks burned; she withdrew it quickly. 'We must go,' she said, all confused. He would gladly have prolonged that moment, but went loyally to do her bidding.[10]

The dawn signifies succour, relief, warmth, reminding us that Apollo was not only sun-god but god of healing. The sunrise is contrasted with the primitive terrors of the night. Jefferies has exposed his characters to its perils to point up the thinness of the dividing-line between rational consciousness and the primal fears lurking not far below the mind's surface. The former certainties disappear. Old shepherds' tales of spirits haunting the downs, references to Jack O' Lantern and the Ould Un, and the distorted face of a gibbous moon 'red as ruddle', create an uncanny

[9] *Greene Ferne Farm*, With an introduction by Andrew Rossabi [1880] (London: Grafton Books, 1986), p.71.
[10] *ibid.,* pp.77-8.

atmosphere. We share the characters' anxiety and distress. The dawn, when it comes, is welcome indeed.

The mysterious footsteps turn out to have been those of the shepherd Jabez on his way home from market. Jabez, who can find his way over the downs with his head in a sack, has contrived to get lost, for which he blames the Ould Un. Geoffrey, however, surmises that he has more probably been seduced by the bottle.

Notable is the attention paid to the blue of the dawn sky, described with painterly exactness, even if Jefferies can find no equal to it. Blue—the 'rich blue of the unattainable flower of the sky'[11]; the blue of the sea 'in deeper ocean'[12]; 'the firm blue of the northern sky' above the front of the British Museum[13]; blue chalkhill flowers, speedwell, bugle, meadow's cranesbill, ground-ivy; the blue butterflies visiting the tiny flowers of the thyme; the bluish-white light of the star Vega—the colour recurs in Jefferies' work with a symbolic force akin to the Blue Flower (*Die Blaue Blume*) that became the emblem of the poet Novalis and the German Romantic painters, standing for an intense yet undefined aspiration (*sehnsucht*) after the infinite.[14]

In his *Theory of Colours (Zur Farbenlehre,* 1810[15]) Goethe described blue as cold, ever-receding, epitomised by the sky which we can never lay hands on.

> As we readily follow an agreeable object that flies from us, so we love to contemplate blue, not because it advances to us, but because it draws us after it.[16]

A similar idea is found in the essay 'Meadow Thoughts' where Jefferies recalls how the sunlight extinguished the pages of the books he brought out to read in the garden at Coate, 'in the shadow of the American crab tree':

> … the light of the sky put out the written pages. For this beautiful and wonderful light excited a sense of some likewise beautiful and wonderful truth, some unknown but grand thought hovering as a swallow above. The swallows hovered and did not alight, but they were there. An inexpressible thought quivered in the azure overhead; it could not be fully grasped, but there was a sense and feeling of its presence.[17]

For Wassily Kandinsky, pioneer of abstraction, blue was the most heavenly, most spiritual of colours. In *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1912) he wrote that

> The deeper its tone, the more intense and characteristic the effect. We feel a call to the infinite, a desire for purity and transcendence.
> *Blue is the typical heavenly colour.* [18]

In Jefferies' work blue is often associated with his aspiration to the beyond, to the something higher than deity.

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[11] *The Story of My Heart* [1883] (London: Quartet Books, 1979), p.31.
[12] *ibid.*
[13] 'The Pigeons at the British Museum,' *The Life of the Fields* [1884] (London: Chatto & Windus, 1906), p.215.
[14] On blue and German Romanticism see John Gage, 'Mood Indigo, From the Blue Flower to the Blue Rider,' pp.122-130, in *The Romantic Spirit in German Art 1790-1990*, Catalogue of an Exhibition organized in 1994-5 by the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh, and the Hayward Gallery, South Bank Centre, London, with the assistance of the Nationalgalerie, Berlin.
[15] Translated into English by Charles Lock Eastlake R.A., F.R.S., and published by John Murray in 1840 as *Goethe's Theory of Colours.*
[16] *ibid.,* p.311.
[17] 'Meadow Thoughts,' *The Life of the Fields*, *op.cit.,* p.60.
[18] Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, The Documents of Modern Art: Volume 5, Edited by Robert Motherwell (New York: George Wittenborn, Inc., 1966), p.58.

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In *Greene Ferne Farm* the dawn also heralds the birth of love between Geoffrey and Margaret, drawn together by their common adventure, their shared endurance of the rigours of the night on the downs. The glory of the sunrise seals their new intimacy. They lose themselves in the spectacle and instinctively respond to its beauty. The dawn acts as love's objective correlative, recalling an entry in Jefferies' notebooks, 'Love is a continual dawn'.[19]

The beauty and exactness of the description, the rightness of the psychological observation—the solar rays darting forth awaken an answering movement in Geoffrey's breast, his involuntary step forward that of a reborn Adam reclaiming his lost paradise— suggest the dawn is as much spiritual as earthly. However, the spiritual is balanced by a robust paganism, a hint of solar worship in the way Jefferies personifies the rising sun: 'the great orb, quivering with golden flames, looked forth upon the world'. The language recalls that of a Homeric hymn: the Greek epithets for Apollo were 'all-seeing' and 'far-darting'.

There are many traces of sun-worship in Jefferies: for example, in the essay 'Nature and Eternity'.

> What a great god the sun must be to the finches from whose wings his beams are reflected in glittering gold! The abstract idea of a deity apart, as they feel their life-blood stirring, their eyelids opening, with the rising sun; as they fly to satisfy their hunger with those little fruits they use; as they revel in the warm sunshine, and utter soft notes of love to their beautiful mates, they cannot but feel a sense, unnamed, indefinite, of joyous gratitude towards that great orb which is very akin to the sensual worship of ancient days. Darkness and cold are Typhon and Ahriman, light and warmth, Osiris and Ormuzd, indeed to them; with song they welcome the spring and celebrate the awakening of Adonis. Lovely little idolaters, my heart goes with them. Deep down in the mysteries of organic life there are causes for the marvellously extended grasp which the worship of light once held upon the world, hardly yet guessed at, and which even now play a part unsuspected in the motives of men. Even yet, despite our artificial life, despite railroads, telegraphs, printing-press, in the face of firm monotheistic convictions, once a year the old, old influence breaks forth, driving thousands and thousands from cities and houses out into field and forest, to the seashore and mountain-top, to gather fresh health and strength from the Sun, from the Air-Jove and old Ocean.[20]

Jefferies' working title for his autobiography in his notebooks was 'Sun-Life' or 'Soul-Life', usually abbreviated to 'S.L.'

W.J. Keith has observed how the sun played a similarly central role in the imagination of other consumptive writers such as Llewelyn Powys and D.H. Lawrence.[21] In Lawrence's story 'Sun' a woman desires 'to go naked to the sun' and 'to come together with the sun' –

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[19] *The Nature Diaries and Note-Books of Richard Jefferies*, edited with an introduction and notes by Samuel J. Looker (London: The Grey Walls Press Ltd., 1948) [November 1883], p.157.

[20] *The Hills and the Vale*, with an introduction by Edward Thomas (London: Duckworth & Co., 1909), p.285. On p.290 Jefferies refers to the Egyptian sun-god Râ ('the loving warmth of its [the bird's] great god Ra, the sun'). The eponymous hero of the novel 'The Rise of Maximin' (1876) has written a poem called 'Rah' or 'Sunlight'.

[21] W.J. Keith, *op.cit*., pp.140-41.

She had never seen the naked sun stand up pure upon the sea-line, shaking the night off himself, like wetness. And he was full and naked. And she wanted to come to him.[22]

Of New Mexico Lawrence wrote:

I think New Mexico was the greatest experience from the outside world I have ever had. It certainly changed me for ever… In the magnificent fierce morning of New Mexico one sprang awake, a new part of the soul woke up suddenly and the old world gave way to a new… All those mornings when I stood, in the fierce, proud silence of the Rockies, on their foothills, to look far over the desert to the blue mountains away in Arizona, blue as chalcedony, with the sage-brush desert sweeping grey-blue in between, dotted with tiny cube-crystals of houses, the vast amphitheatre of lofty, indomitable desert… What splendour! Only the tawny eagle could really sail out into the splendour of it all.[23]

Jefferies' inspiration was chaster, more Victorian, turned towards the Greek and Egyptian gods rather than Etruscan or Mexican. Margaret Estcourt's blushing cheeks in *Greene Ferne Farm* echo the pencil streaks of red cloud in the sky and recall the Homeric epithet for the dawn, 'rosy-fingered'.

In Greek mythology Eos, goddess of the dawn, was drawn in a rose-coloured chariot and opened with rosy fingers the pearl gates of the east, pouring dew upon the earth and making the flowers grow. Her chariot was drawn by white horses and she was covered with a veil. Night and Sleep fled and the stars disappeared at her approach. She always set out before the sun and was the forerunner of his rising. She was the mother of Eosphoros, the Dawn-bringer, or morning-star, and of the Ethiopian king Memnon, killed by Achilles in the Trojan War. The Ethiopians erected to Memnon a colossal statue that made a melodious sound like the plucking of a lyre string when touched by the first ray of the rising sun. Jefferies mentions the statue in his essay 'The Dawn'.[24]

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There is another rhapsodic description of the dawn in Chapter XLVIII of *Bevis*. Bevis and Mark have finally learned the identity of the mysterious visitor to the island where they are castaways: not Indians or a tiger as they supposed, but a small girl called Loo. After returning her to the mainland Bevis and Mark settle down for the night. Bevis wants to be up early to shoot a heron for its plume. Waking about three he takes the matchlock and walks through the wood to high ground that looks out over the still waters of the New Sea. Too absorbed to notice his surroundings until now he looks up at the tops of the tall firs and becomes conscious of the beauty of the morning, 'for it was more open there, and he could see a breadth of the sky'.[25]

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[22] D.H. Lawrence, 'Sun,' in *The Princess and Other Stories*, Edited by Keith Sagar (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), p.118.

[23] D.H. Lawrence, 'New Mexico' [1928], in *Selected Essays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1950), pp.181-2.

[24] 'The Dawn,' *The Hills and the Vale, op.cit.,* p.308.

[25] *Bevis*, Edited with an Introduction by Peter Hunt, The World's Classics (Oxford University Press, 1989), p.391.
Firs again lift the eye to the blue heaven in the essay 'Wild Flowers' (*The Open Air, op.cit*., p.28):

Immediately the high fir-trees guided the eye upwards, and from their tops to the deep azure of the March sky over, but a step from the tree to the heavens.

and in *The Story of My Heart (op.cit.,* p.71):

There follows one of the book's most exalted passages, a pendant to the evocation of the night-sky in 'Bevis's Zodiac'. Again the focus is on the colour blue:

> The sun had not yet stood out from the orient, but his precedent light shone through the translucent blue. Yet it was not blue, nor is there any word, nor is a word possible to convey the feeling unless one could be built up of signs and symbols like those in the book of the magician, which glowed and burned to and fro the page. For the blue of the precious sapphire is thick to it, the turquoise dull; these hard surfaces are no more to be compared to it than sand and gravel. They are but stones, hard, cold, pitiful, that which gives them their lustre is the light. Through delicate porcelain sometimes the light comes, and it is not the porcelain, it is the light that is lovely. But porcelain is clay, and the light is shorn, checked, and shrunken. Down through the beauteous azure came the Light itself, pure, unreflected Light, untouched, untarnished even by the dew-sweetened petal of a flower, descending, flowing like a wind, a wind of glory sweeping through the blue. A luminous purple glowing as Love glows in the cheek, so glowed the passion of the heavens.
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> Two things only reach the soul. By touch there is indeed emotion. But the light in the eye, the sound of the voice! the soul trembles and like a flame leaps to meet them. So to the luminous purple azure his heart ascended.
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> Bevis, the lover of the sky, gazed and forgot; forgot as we forget that our pulses beat, having no labour to make them. Nor did he hear the south wind singing in the fir tops.
>
> I do not know how any can slumber with this over them; how any can look down at the clods. The greatest wonder on earth is that there are any not able to see the earth's surpassing beauty. Such moments are beyond the chronograph and any measure of wheels; the passing of one cog may be equal to a century, for the mind has no time. What an incredible marvel it is that there are human creatures that slumber threescore and ten years, and look down at the clods and then say, "We are old, we have lived seventy years." Seventy years! The passing of one cog is longer; seven hundred times seventy years would not equal the click of the tiniest cog while the mind was living its own life. Sleep and clods, with the glory of the earth, and the sun, and the sea, and the endless ether around us! Incredible marvel this sleep and clods and talk of years. But I suppose it was only a second or two, for some slight movement attracted him, and he looked, and instantly the vision above was forgotten.[26]

The movement is that of an otter, which Bevis proceeds to shoot. One of the strengths of *Bevis* is its naturalism. The exalted thoughts aroused by the luminous blue of the dawn sky abruptly give way to the ferocity of a country boy dealing slaughter with his gun.

The passage is not flawless. A captious critic might find a hint of Pre-Raphaelite aestheticism in the vagueness of 'nor is a word possible to convey the feeling', in the self-consciously 'poetic' words 'orient' for east and 'beauteous' for beautiful, and in the syrupy adjective 'dew-sweetened'. However, the passage lives, throbs, sweeps the reader along by force of feeling. It describes one of those privileged moments when the subject enters a dimension where linear time ceases and all time is eternally present.

The narrator of Marcel Proust's *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* experiences similar moments when the taste of a madeleine biscuit dipped in tea restores to him a memory of long-forgotten childhood holidays at Combray; and again towards the end of the novel when, tripping over two uneven paving-stones in the courtyard of the Prince de Guermantes, he has

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But it was the tall firs that pleased me most; the glance rose up the flame-shaped fir-tree, tapering to its green tip, and above was the azure sky. By the aid of the tree I felt the sky more.

[26] *Bevis, op.cit.,* pp.391-2.

a vision of dazzling azure that proves a hitherto lost memory of Venice, where he had once similarly tripped in the baptistery of St Mark's. Such moments of time regained allow him to transcend the brevity of human life and experience a moment of eternity. The reliving of a fraction of the past in the present joins present and past in a dimension outside time. The narrator enters an extra-temporal realm where death no longer holds any fears for him. Such moments involve a loss of normal consciousness. The narrator says that if they had lasted any longer he would probably have fainted. Though they bring a sense of eternity, they are fugitive, short-lived.

Bevis' moment of absorption, when 'his heart ascended to the luminous purple azure,' is likewise timeless, beyond the measure of clocks: 'seven hundred times seventy years would not equal the click of the tiniest cog while the mind was living its own life.' The moment brings an awakening, a heightening of consciousness, in contrast to the sleep, the clod-like existence, of the majority: 'I do not know how any can slumber with this over them.'

Jefferies considered blindness to the beauty of nature a blasphemy, almost a crime. In *The Dewy Morn* Robert Godwin, bailiff to the vacuous Squire Cornleigh Cornleigh, embodies that blindness and insensitivity. Embittered by the heroine's Felise's rejection of him long ago, and become a prisoner of habit, he ignores the alchemy taking place in the east as he has ignored the beautiful night sky the previous evening. He is coldly indifferent to it all. Yet

> Overhead and eastwards there shone a glory of blue heaven, illuminated from within with a golden light. The deep rich azure was lit up with an inner gold; it was a time to worship, to lift up the heart. Is there anything so wondrously beautiful as the sky just before the sun rises in summer?[27]

In the mystical state of union with the Absolute the boundaries between inner and outer dissolve. In *Bevis* the inner dawn of the boy's enlightenment corresponds to the physical dawn. The spiritual awakening finds objective correlative in the outer and celestial.[28] According to Vedantic philosophy the world is most full of *sattva* (purity, knowledge, calm) at sunrise and sunset: they are the most spiritual and divine hours of the day.

Much of *Bevis* is bathed in a light like that of Wordsworth's Immortality Ode[29] and the early books of *The Prelude*: the light of childhood, when the earth appears 'apparelled in celestial light,/ The glory and the freshness of a dream'; the light of 'the hour/ Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower'; the 'visionary gleam' that dims as 'Shades of the prison-house begin to close/ Upon the growing Boy', until it fades 'into the light of common day'.

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[27] *The Dewy Morn* [1884] (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1900), p.144.

[28] In *The Story of My Heart* Jefferies says he prayed with earth, sun, sky, stars and ocean

> as if they were the keys of an instrument, of an organ, with which I swelled forth the notes of my soul, redoubling my own voice by their power. (*op.cit*., p.32)

and that

> I was sensitive to all things, to the earth under, and the star-hollow round about; to the least blade of grass, to the largest oak. They seemed like exterior nerves and veins for the conveyance of feeling to me. (*op.cit*., p.133)

[29] Full title: 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood'. For an interesting discussion of the recurrence in Wordsworth's poetry of words to do with *light* (*gleam, flash, sparkle, light, glister, glisten, glitter, lustre, flash, splendour,* etc) see Hugh Sykes Davies, *Wordsworth and the Worth of Words*, Edited by John Kerrigan and Jonathan Wordsworth (Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp.79-89.

There is no evidence that Jefferies read Wordsworth[30]: it is curious he never mentions him, although he had much in common with the poet in the depth of his response to nature. However we catch echoes here and there, particularly of the first book of *The Prelude. Wood Magic* and *Bevis* might have as their motto the lines:

> Thus often in those fits of vulgar joy
> Which, through all seasons, on a child's pursuits
> Are prompt attendants, 'mid that giddy bliss
> Which, like a tempest, works along the blood
> And is forgotten; even then I felt
> Gleams like the flashing of a shield;—the earth
> And common face of Nature spake to me
> Rememberable things.[31]

and

> Those recollected hours that have the charm
> Of visionary things, and lovely forms
> And sweet sensations that throw back our life,
> And almost make our infancy itself
> A visible scene, on which the sun is shining. [32]

The boy Wordsworth, like the youthful Jefferies, 'loved the sun'.[33] Both 'had seen him lay/ His beauty on the morning hills'.[34] Bevis and Mark 'bathed in air and sunbeam and gathered years of health, like flowers from the field,' [35] while the poet recalled how as a boy he had

> Made one long bathing of a summer's day;
> Basked in the sun, and plunged and basked again
> Alternate, all a summer's day, or coursed
> Over the sandy fields, leaping through groves
> Of yellow groundsel; or… stood alone
> Beneath the sky, as if I had been born
> On Indian plains, and from my mother's hut
> Had run abroad in wantonness, to sport
> A naked savage, in the thunder shower.[36]

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In *The Story of My Heart* Jefferies relates how

> So long since that I have forgotten the date[37], I used every morning to visit a spot where I could get a clear view of the east. Immediately on rising I went out to some elms; thence I could see across the dewy fields to the distant hill over or near which the sun rose. These elms partially hid me, for at that time I had a dislike to being seen, feeling that I should be despised if I was noticed. This happened once or twice, and I knew I was watched contemptuously, though no one had the least idea of my

[30] W.J. Keith, 'Jefferies' Reading,' *The Richard Jefferies Society Journal*, No.2 1993, p.20:

> It seems unthinkable that he did not know Wordsworth's poetry, yet it is difficult to believe that Jefferies, had he known it, would have failed to mention one whose work provides so many comparisons with his own.

[31] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, A Parallel Text, Edited by J.C. Maxwell (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), 1805-6 Text, Book First, lines 609-616.
[32] *ibid.,* lines 659-663.
[33] *ibid.,* Book Second, line 184.
[34] *ibid.,* lines 188-9.
[35] *Bevis, op.cit.,* p.94.
[36] *The Prelude,* Book First, lines 294-304 (with omissions).
[37] Thomas thinks 'perhaps, at the age of fifteen' (*op.cit*., p.39).

object. But I went every morning, and was satisfied if I could get two or three minutes to think unchecked. Often I saw the sun rise over the line of the hills, but if it was summer the sun had been up a long time.

I looked at the hills, at the dewy grass, and then up through the elm branches to the sky. In a moment all that was behind me, the house, the people, the sounds, seemed to disappear, and to leave me alone. Involuntarily I drew a long breath, then I breathed slowly. My thought, or inner consciousness, went up through the illumined sky, and I was lost in a moment of exaltation. This lasted only a very short time, perhaps only part of a second, and while it lasted there was no formulated wish. I was absorbed; I drank the beauty of the morning; I was exalted. When it ceased I did wish for some increase or enlargement of my existence to correspond with the largeness of feeling I had momentarily enjoyed. Sometimes the wind came through the tops of the elms, and the slender boughs bent, and gazing up through them, and beyond the fleecy clouds, I felt lifted up. The light coming across the grass and leaving itself on the dew-drops, the sound of the wind, and the sense of mounting to the lofty heaven, filled me with a deep sigh, a wish to draw something out of the beauty of it, some part of that which caused my admiration, the subtle inner essence.

Sometimes the green tips of the highest boughs seemed gilded, the light laid a gold on the green. Or the trees bowed to a stormy wind roaring through them, the grass threw itself down, and in the east broad curtains of a rosy tint stretched along. The light was turned to redness in the vapour, and rain hid the summit of the hill. In the rush and roar of the stormy wind the same exaltation, the same desire, lifted me for a moment. I went there every morning, I could not exactly define why; it was like going to a rose bush to taste the scent of the flower and feel the dew from its petals on the lips. But I desired the beauty—the inner subtle meaning—to be in me, that I might have it, and with it an existence of a higher kind.[38]

Here the sunrise is directly associated with a moment of heightened consciousness, of mystical illumination, when Jefferies lost all sense of individuality and was absorbed into the being of the universe, 'the larger consciousness of the heavens' as he put it in *Bevis*.[39] Thomas observes that Jefferies 'unconsciously use[d] the long breath, followed by slow breathing'[40] that is deliberately practised by adepts as an aid to entering the mystical state of union with the Absolute.

Later Jefferies began to make daily pilgrimages to places where he could meditate in solitude:

There was a feeling that I must go somewhere and be alone. It was a necessity to have a few minutes of this separate life every day; my mind required to live its own life apart from other things.[41]

In the opening chapter of the autobiography Jefferies' desire for a fuller life of the soul, his prayer that he 'might touch to the unutterable existence infinitely higher than deity',[42] is again associated with the dawn:

I prayed… with the morning star, the light-bringer, once now and then when I saw it, a white-gold ball in the violet-purple sky, or framed about with pale summer vapour floating away as red streaks shot horizontally in the east. A diffused saffron ascended into the luminous upper azure. The disk of the sun rose over the hill, fluctuating with throbs of light; his chest heaved in fervour of brilliance. All the glory of the sunrise filled me with broader and furnace-like vehemence of prayer. That I might have the deepest of soul-life, the deepest of all, deeper far than all this greatness of the visible

[38] *The Story of My Heart, op.cit.,* pp.68-9.
[39] *Bevis, op.cit*., p.292.
[40] Thomas, *op.cit.,* p.167.
[41] *The Story of My Heart, op.cit.,* p.70.
[42] *ibid.,* p.31.

universe and even of the invisible; that I might have a fullness of soul till now unknown, and utterly beyond my own conception.[43]

Later in the book the dawn is associated with Jefferies' conviction that there exist whole circles, whole continents, an infinity of ideas beyond the few with which we are familiar:

The dawn at my window ever causes a desire for larger thought, the recognition of the light at the moment of waking kindles afresh the wish for a broad day of the mind.

There is a certainty that there are yet ideas further, and greater—that there is still a limitless beyond, I know at that moment that there is no limit to the things that may be yet in material and tangible shape besides the immaterial perceptions of the soul. The dim white light of the dawn speaks it. This prophet which has come with its wonders to the bedside of every human being for so many thousands of years faces me once again with the upheld finger of light. Where is the limit to that physical sign?[44]

Light, however, is not the end. It merely points to a still greater mystery:

Light is not all; light conceals more than it reveals; light is the darkest shadow of the sky; besides light there are many other mediums yet to be explored.[45]

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'The Dawn' (unpublished during Jefferies' lifetime) poses the same question and explores the same themes. In places the essay is close in word and spirit to the passages cited from the autobiography. Its date is uncertain. Thomas says: 'It may have been 1883, the year of *The Story of My Heart*, or it may have been as late as 1885.' [46] At all events, he describes 'The Dawn' as 'one of the most beautiful things Jefferies wrote after his awakening'[47] and as 'delicately perfect… It is pure spirit'.[48]

The essay begins with Jefferies lying in bed in the dark,

conscious of a faint light not visible if I looked deliberately to find it, but seen sideways, and where I was not gazing. It slipped from direct glance as a shadow may slip from a hand-grasp, but it was there floating in the atmosphere of the room. [49]

The dawn light, intangible, elusive, not to be directly grasped, recalls the mysterious blue mist that the narrator in *Restless Human Hearts* discerns in a painting of the interior of Antwerp Cathedral in the National Gallery.

the long dim arches of the cathedral, solemn and still, are filled with an undefined blue mist. You cannot see this blue mist if you look straight at it, or even if you think of it, or search for it. But it grows out of the canvas as the gaze rests upon it; it steals out from the dark places, and clouds the outlines of the pillars till the roof of the building floats upon azure colour.[50]

The sideways glance recalls the method of peripheral vision Jefferies advocates for seeing through water in the essay 'A Brook':

Even the deepest, darkest water (not, of course, muddy) yields after a while to the eye. Half close the eyelids, and while gazing into it let your intelligence rather wait on the corners of the eye than on the glance you cast straight forward. For some reason when thus gazing the edge of the eye becomes exceedingly sensitive, and you are conscious of

[43] *ibid.,* pp.36-7.
[44] *ibid.,* p.125.
[45] *ibid.,* p.126.
[46] *The Hills and the Vale*, *op.cit*., Introduction, p.xxxi.
[47] *ibid.,* p.xxix.
[48] *ibid.,* p.xxx.
[49] *ibid.,* p.306.
[50] *Restless Human Hearts* [1875] (Longcot: Petton Books, 2008), p.7. Betsy Wieseman, Curator of Dutch Painting at the National Gallery, was unable to identify the painting for certain.

> slight motions or of a thickness—not a defined object, but a thickness which indicates an object—which is otherwise quite invisible.[51]

The light becomes almost a metaphor for the mystery of existence. Jefferies calls the dawn light 'a visitant from the unknown'.[52] A ghostly, spectral presence, it is yet pregnant with significance, like a sign, a messenger, from the other side, from another world. It brings Jefferies right up against the mystery and infinite vastness of creation, its unbelievable quality, the enigma that it poses and that baffles comprehension. It takes him back to the time of the builders of the pyramids 'five thousand years ago',[53] to whom the light came 'like an arrow from the sun'.

> To me it comes white and spectral in the silence, a finger pointed, a voice saying, 'Even now you know nothing'.[54]

Jefferies reasons that just as the pyramid builders were persuaded they understood the universe, and the secrets of life and death, so we, who with our instruments have parted and divided light, and are equally sure we have divined its secrets, may be in an equivalent state of ignorance. Even now there may be undeciphered messages in the pale beam of light at his bedside. On distant planets there may be beings able to transmit their thoughts by rays of light 'as we do along wires'. 'For ought we know' they may have already tried to communicate with us in this way 'time after time':

> Such a message is possibly contained sometimes in the pale beam which comes to my bedside. That beam always impresses me with a profound, an intense and distressful sense of ignorance, of being outside the intelligence of the universe, as if there were a vast civilisation in view and yet not entered. Mere villagers and rustics creeping about a sullen earth, we know nothing of the grandeur and intellectual brilliance of that civilisation.[55]

The dawn thus illuminates Jefferies' sense of his and mankind's ignorance. He postulates that if the greater intelligences that dwell on other planets were to communicate with us, they might help us conquer the disease and misery that oppress the majority in our world. He is positive there exist 'things absolutely different to any that have come under eyesight',[56] invisible forces more delicate, more ethereal than light, forces that 'may outstrip light in speed as light outstrips an arrow'. There may even be 'other things beside matter and motion, or force.'[57] The grey dawn rising every morning warns him not to be certain that all is known. The infinitude of space forces him to the conclusion that there is more. 'I cannot think that the universe can be so very, very easy as this.'[58]

'The Dawn' is remarkable because it powerfully conveys a sense of the unknown, of the vast cosmos of ideas beyond the narrow circle inside which we habitually move, through the simple, familiar image of the pale spectral finger of light shining through the window each morning. The symbolic meaning of the light has expanded from individual illumination to the superior knowledge of extra-terrestrial civilisations. With its emphasis on

[51] 'A Brook,' *Nature Near London* [1883] (London: Chatto & Windus, 1901), p.58.
[52] 'The Hills and the Vale,' *op.cit*., p.306.
[53] *ibid.,* p.307.
[54] *ibid.,* p.308.
[55] *ibid.,* p.309.
[56] *ibid.,* p.310.
[57] *ibid.,* p.311.
[58] *ibid.,* p.312.

physics and astronomy, the essay contains a prophecy of the dawning of the age of Aquarius, when science will be applied for the benefit of humanity.

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In the opening and closing chapters of *The Dewy Morn* the dawn heralds both the birth and the fulfilment of love between Martial Barnard and Felise Goring. Its beauty, as we have seen, is the touchstone by which is measured Godwin's brute insensitivity to the finer things in life, to the world of poetry and imagination and dream.

The book begins with an exquisite description of a walk taken soon after sunrise one May morning by Felise. It was Q.D. Leavis who said that Jefferies 'had a sensuous nature akin to but more robust than Keats".[59] Dew, dawn, and down here form a trinity, as often in Jefferies.

> The fragrance of the dew, invisibly evaporating, filled the air she [Felise] breathed. From sweet-green hawthorn leaves, from heavy grasses drooping, the glittering drops dissolving brought with them the odour of leaf and flower.[60]

Everything has a spring-like freshness and purity, 'a strain of the earth's sweet being in the beginning/ In Eden garden'[61]: the cowslip 'which no bee had yet sipped'[62] and which Felise puts to her lips; the blue veronica [speedwell] in the grass; the young pink-eared rabbit nibbling peacefully; the bracken 'freshly-green, and rising rapidly now day by day';[63] the yellowhammer perched on a gate, singing.

Seated on a fallen oak trunk, Felise bathes in the beauty of the morning:

> her frame drooped as the soul, which bears it up, flowed outwards, feeling to grass, and flower, and leaf, as the swimmer spreads the arms abroad, and the fingers feel the water.[64]

Like Rimbaud, Felise 'has embraced the summer dawn'.[65]

Beauty of morning, beauty of youth. Felise's supple limbs are filled 'with the plenty of ripe youth'.[66] She has upon her the bloom, 'that glow of the morn of life.'[67] She is a true Daughter of the Dawn. Edward Thomas wrote: 'she is a beautiful lover born not out of the bitter sea, but out of the streaming dew that makes the grass sweeter than honeycomb'.[68]

A blackbird bathing in a ditch, the fresh May green of the hawthorn leaves, a lark's song, all so distract Felise that she misses the sunrise.

Much of the attraction of the dawn that Jefferies felt so young and so intensely must have been simply a response to the beauty of early morning. Edward Thomas perfectly captures the mood in 'The Glory'. The poem has the same quality of Eden vision as the opening chapter of *The Dewy Morn*:

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[59] Q.D. Leavis, 'Lives and Works of Richard Jefferies,' *Scrutiny*, March 1938, Vol.4, p.437.
[60] *The Dewy Morn*, *op.cit*., p.1.
[61] 'Spring', *Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, Selected with an Introduction by W.H. Gardner [1953] (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967), p.28.
[62] *The Dewy Morn, op.cit.,* p.2.
[63] *ibid.,* p.3.
[64] *ibid.,* p.4.
[65] 'J'ai embrassé l'aube d'été', Arthur Rimbaud, 'Aube', XXII in 'Les Illuminations', *Oeuvres Complètes*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Texte établi et annoté par Rolland de Renéville et Jules Mouquet (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1963), p.194.
[66] *The Dewy Morn, op.cit.,* p.4.
[67] *ibid.,* p.5.
[68] Thomas, *op.cit*., p.209.

The glory of the beauty of the morning, —
The cuckoo crying over the untouched dew;
The blackbird that has found it, and the dove
That tempts me on to something sweeter than love;
White clouds ranged even and fair as new-mown hay:
The heat, the stir, the sublime vacancy
Of sky and meadow and forest and my own heart: —
The glory invites me, yet it leaves me scorning
All I can ever do, all I can be,
Beside the lovely of motion, shape, and hue,
The happiness I fancy fit to dwell
In beauty's presence.[69]

The freshness and purity of the morning, the sense of rebirth and renewal, is evoked in the majestic roll of the opening lines of Shakespeare's sonnet:

Full many a glorious morning have I seen
Flatter the mountain-tops with sovereign eye,
Kissing with golden face the meadows green,
Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy;[70]

The purity of the early morning air, its healthy life-giving properties, remind us that Jefferies always put his faith in natural medicines. In *Amaryllis at the Fair* he cites approvingly the dictum of 'bluff, gruff, rule-of-thumb old Butler':

'If you wants to get well,' old Dr Butler used to say, 'you go for a walk in the marning afore the aair have been braathed auver.'

Before the air has been breathed over—inspired and re-inspired by human crowds, while it retains the sweetness of the morning, like water fresh from the spring; that was when it possessed its value, according to bluff, gruff, rule-of-thumb old Butler. Depend upon it, there is something in his dictum, too.[71]

Allied to this freshness, and expressive of it, are the dew-laden grass 'flashing emerald and ruby' and the sweetness of the birdsong in spring and early summer: the clarion of the thrush from his station high in an oak, speckled breast swelling in the sun; the piercing, dashing notes of the secretive wren; 'the lark's song like a waterfall in the sky'.[72] The air, and the colours of leaf, flower and grass, are washed clean by the dawn, as a stream runs itself clear during the night.

R.C. Zaehner, an authority on mysticism and eastern religion, thinks Jefferies may independently have discovered the subtle energy that the Indian yogi calls *prāna,* the force that Jefferies said was 'more subtle than electricity'.[73] *Prāna* means 'breath', 'vital force', or simply 'wind'. It is akin to the *pneuma* of the Greeks, the fertilising wind that was believed to impregnate mares when they turned their hindquarters to it; and to the *anima* of the Romans. It is the breath of life, 'the spirit which animates the universe and which breathes in man'. [74]

[69] Edward Thomas, *Selected Poems*, Selected and introduced by R.S. Thomas (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), p.28.
[70] Sonnet XXXIII, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (Oxford University Press, 1955), p.1110.
[71] *Amaryllis at the Fair, A Novel*, Introduction by Andrew Rossabi [1887] (London: Quartet Books, 1980), p.52.
[72] *The Story of My Heart, op.cit*., p.48.
[73] *ibid.,* p.65.
[74] R.C. Zaehner, *Mysticism Sacred and Profane*, An Inquiry into some Forms of Praeternatural Experience [1957] (Oxford University Press, 1975), p.48.

Correct breathing is of paramount importance to students of yoga. The air is never purer than early in the morning, on the hills or by the sea. In *The Story of My Heart* Jefferies refers to the purity of the air: 'I thought of the wandering air — its pureness, which is its beauty'.[75] The air is particularly pure on the downs, as Jefferies noted in 'The Breeze on Beachy Head':

> But the glory of these glorious Downs is the breeze. The air in the valleys immediately beneath them is pure and pleasant; but the least climb, even a hundred feet, puts you on a plane with the atmosphere itself, uninterrupted by so much as the tree-tops. It is air without admixture. If it comes from the south, the waves refine it; if inland, the wheat and flowers and grass distil it.[76]

It is as if the downs retained some of the saline purity of their oceanic origin. 'Like the goddess,' writes H.J. Massingham in *English Downland*, a Batsford book which, besides being an informed and evocative survey of chalk country with many fine photographs, has the merit of quoting Jefferies on the first page,

> Like the goddess, chalk originally rose from the sea, white and gleaming as she. Its body was made up of infinite myriads of little animals with shells of silica which had drifted down into the abysses in a slow rain, dripping drop by drop through countless aeons of time.[77]

A slow process indeed: it took 500 years to deposit one millimetre of chalk, 50 million years to lay down a total of 330 ft of rock.

More *prāna* may be naturally present in the atmosphere in the early morning than at any other time of day. Certain months seem particularly invigorating, the spring months of April, May and June, for example, whereas July and August are more sluggish and sultry. We all know those brilliant mornings that sometimes dawn after a storm or period of prolonged depression, a week of rain that kept us fretting indoors as children—mornings when the sky is washed blue and flocked with scudding cumulus, the air heavily oxygenated, and the earth renewed, as if purged overnight of her evil vapours. There is a mood of April pleasure, a fever, a giddy intoxication in the air, that makes one want to dance and lift one's head and sing with a joy half out its senses: a peerless morning such as Jefferies describes in his notebook for May 14, 1879:

> Lark singing beautifully in the still dark and clouded sky at a quarter to three o'clock in the morning; about twenty minutes afterwards the first thrush: thought I heard distant cuckoo—not sure: and ten minutes after that the copse by garden perfectly ringing with the music. A beautiful May morning; thoroughly English morning: southerly wind, warm light breeze, smart showers of warm rain, and intervals of brilliant sunshine; the leaves in copse beautiful delicate green, refreshed, cleaned, and a still more lovely green from the shower; behind them the blue sky, and above the bright sun; white detached clouds sailing past.[78]

A Constable landscape, sunshine and shower, the green fresh and sparkling under rain and sun.

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[75] *The Story of My Heart, op.cit.,* p.31.
[76] 'The Breeze on Beachy Head,' *Nature Near London, op.cit.,* p.240.
[77] H.J. Massingham, *English Downland*, The Face of Britain series [1936] (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1949), p.2.
[78] *The Nature Diaries and Note-books of Richard Jefferies*, *op.cit.,* p.47.

Thus the dawn was constellated in Jefferies' psyche as well as in the external world: it stood for the dawn of consciousness, for spiritual enlightenment. It was the symbol of Jefferies' illumination, the dawn of knowledge rising out of the cloud of unknowing.

W.J. Keith[79] has pointed out how often in *The Story of My Heart* Jefferies links the spiritual and physical worlds by means of metaphors drawn from nature. Among the examples he cites from the opening chapter are 'the rain of deep feeling,'[80] 'the dust which settles on the heart,'[81] 'to drink deeply at the fresh fountains of life,'[82] 'the pure air of thought,'[83] 'a wider horizon of feeling,'[84] and 'the unattainable flower of the sky.'[85] Later Jefferies speaks of suffering 'a moral drought'.[86] The metaphors act to fuse the two worlds of subjective and objective, inner and outer.

'The pure air of thought' recalls that Hermes (Roman name Mercury), messenger of the gods, was represented with winged helmet and sandals, and traditionally associated with air, air being symbolic of thought, its native element. Similarly water, especially the sea, commonly symbolises feeling and emotion. So Jefferies says his passion rose 'tumultuous as the waves'; the sea is within him, every boom of the wave repeats his prayer.[87]

Again, he desires the endurance and strength of the sun: in astrology the sun is the ruler of Leo, sign of fixed fire, strongest of the signs in terms of outgoing energy. Jefferies' own sun-sign was Scorpio, sign of fixed water, corresponding to the eighth house of death and rebirth, most passionate of the signs, but also in higher types the most repressed, in love with what is secret and hidden, often with an interest in the occult.

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In *The Dewy Morn* the dawn stands for the birth of love rather than for enlightenment, if the two can be separated. The novel is a hymn to Eros, a celebration of its beauty and its power. It has the same passionate spirit as the autobiography. In his note-books Jefferies had described *The Story of My Heart* as a 'Long Paean of Soul to God, a paean in itself of its own existence.'[88] Much of *The Dewy Morn* is similarly a paean, to the love of life and of beauty. It is one of the most perfect because purest of Jefferies' books. There are none of the outbursts of misanthropic spleen and bigotry that mar some of his other writings.

The picture of the dawn in the final chapter is among the most moving passages. Felise and Martial are now married. The man sleeps, while the woman 'wakeful in her happiness, stole to the window where she had so

[79] W.J. Keith, *Richard Jefferies*, A Critical Study (University of Toronto Press, 1965), p.93.
[80] *The Story of My Heart, op.cit.,* p.29.
[81] *ibid.*
[82] *ibid.*
[83] *ibid.*
[84] *ibid.,* p.30.
[85] *ibid.,* p.31.
[86] *ibid.,* p.86.
[87] *ibid.,* p.135.
[88] *The Nature Diaries and Note-books of Richard Jefferies, op.cit.* [24 March 1883], p.129.

often sat of old time'.[89] It is very early one morning in May, and Felise sits watching the sky. Writes Thomas, 'the contented woman is drawn against the vast loveliness of dawn.' [90] Upon the ground lies a stratum of darkness like a mist. 'Through this the lark soaring sang in the clear air above.' [91] A white light rushes imperceptibly through the atmosphere and spreads along the distant ridge of hills. There follows a magical yet exact description of the night sky giving way to dawn:

> So long as the night-blue tint of the sky continued the stars shone; as the dawn-beams shot upwards and increased in brightness this night-blue tint began to change, and with it the stars retired into the depths of space.[92]

Thrush and blackbird begin to sing, a score of them, 'their chorus burst upon the dawn.'

> The stars were gone, and the deep azure of the morning filled the sky. By the ridge of the hill the white light shone brightly; above it a purple mingled luminously with the blue; towards the zenith the loveliness of the colour is not to be written.[93]

The dawn shines on Felise's face, 'and upon the beautiful golden hair drooping to her knees'. Her hands are folded, 'the same attitude in great happiness as in inconsolable sorrow; the dawn glistened upon the tears in her eyes.'[94]

She is at perfect rest.

> Except to love and to love fulfilled and then only to woman, is such rest ever given. For the heart, and the hand, and the mind of a man are for ever driving onwards, and no profundity of rest ever comes to his inmost consciousness.[95] At dawn he looks forward to the noonday…
>
> A golden breath came up among the bright whiteness of the light over the ridge of the hill; there were scarlet streaks, the lips of the morning. In the glorious beauty of the sunrise her heart brimmed to the full of love.[96]

Martial calls her name, and is answered by 'a kiss amid the dew of loving tears.' [97]

Dew runs as a leitmotif through the novel, whose title is taken from *The Passionate Pilgrim,* two lines of which serve for epigraph:

> Scarce had the sun dried up the dewy morn,
> And scarce the herd gone to the hedge for shade.

The most evocative of Jefferies' titles, *The Dewy Morn* conveys the essence of his *oeuvre,* its qualities of freshness and purity. It has been said that 'Jefferies' words… are like a glassy covering of the things described'[98]; and at its best his prose has an inner radiance, a prismatic diamantine colouring, that one associates with religious writing.

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[89] *The Dewy Morn, op. cit.,* p.392.
[90] Thomas, *ibid*., p.223.
[91] *ibid.,* p.393.
[92] *ibid.*
[93] *ibid.,* p.394.
[94] *ibid.*
[95] The same idea is expressed at the end of the early novel *Restless Human Hearts* (1875).
[96] *ibid.,* pp.395-6.
[97] *ibid.,* p.396.
[98] Cited by Thomas (*op.cit*., p.298), who does not give his source. Henry S. Salt in *Richard Jefferies: His Life & His Ideals* (London: Arthur C. Fifield, 1905) speaks of 'a style where it might seem that the words, as has been said of Shelley's words, "were really transparent, or that they throbbed with living lustres"—there is such crystalline brilliancy, and withal a heart of fire, both in the idea and in the expression' (p.105), and perhaps Thomas had this passage in mind.

The writer perhaps most akin to Jefferies in the marriage of intense feeling with luminous clarity in the depiction of natural phenomena was his contemporary Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889), who once said he knew 'the beauty of our Lord' by a bluebell [99] and wrote:

> The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
> It will flame out, like shining from shook foil.[100]

Hopkins found the essence of things both in their Platonic form and in their individual Thisness or *haecceitas*, as his philosophic mentor, the Schoolman Duns Scotus (1266 or 1274-1308), termed it. His poetry has, like Jefferies' prose, a dawn-like quality of revelation in the literal sense of a curtain being drawn aside or back to reveal something previously hidden:

> I caught this morning morning's minion, king-
> dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon...[101]

Hopkins also wrote

> And for all this, nature is never spent;
> There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
> And though the last lights off the black West went
> Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs –
> Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
> World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.[102]

Had he been able to read him (Hopkins' poetry was published posthumously by his friend Robert Bridges in 1918, nearly thirty years after the poet's death) Jefferies would surely have approved those lines, he who was fond of quoting the lines from *Faust*:

> Thy works sublime are now as bright
> As on creation's day they rose.[103]

In sum, the dawn penetrated Jefferies' work until it shared its qualities of freshness and purity, epitomised by the dew. Edward Thomas memorably expressed the effect of Jefferies' long communion with nature:

> Air and sun so cleaned and sweetened his work that in the end the cleanness and sweetness of Nature herself become inseparable from it in our minds.[104]

and spoke of his having 'a spirituality now close as the grass, and now as the stars.' [105] The dawn represents the spiritual fragrance that permeates Jefferies' best work. Watching the dawn became, like drinking the pure sunlit water from the spring in 'the green-roofed cave' [106] in the hills,

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[99] *Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, Selected with an Introduction and Notes by W.H. Gardner [1953] (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967), journal entry dated 18 May 1870, p.120.

[100] 'God's Grandeur,' *ibid.,* p.27.

[101] 'The Windhover,' *ibid*., p.30. Later in the poem, which he dedicated 'To Christ our Lord,' Hopkins likened the swinging turn of the kestrel to 'a skate's heel' sweeping 'smooth on a bow-bend', an image similar to that used by Jefferies to describe the bird's soaring flight in 'Birds Climbing the Air' in *The Life of The Fields* (1884):

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

[102] 'God's Grandeur,' *ibid*., p.27.

[103] Lines cited in *Greene Ferne Farm, op.cit.,* p.23. W.J. Keith writes in his 'Notes on *Greene Ferne Farm*' (February 1979), p.2: 'from the "Prologue in Heaven" at the opening of Goethe's *Faust* in Lewis Filmore's translation (1841).'

[104] *The Hills and the Vale, op.cit.,* p.xxxi.

[105] *ibid.*

[106] 'Meadow Thoughts', *The Life of the Fields, op.cit.,* p.66.

'sacramental'.[107] Jefferies' heart lifted when he saw the sun mount the ridge of the distant down and shoot forth his rays: in answer he sent out a prayer, much as in *The Dewy Morn* 'of old, old time' the women of Greece went out to offer a prayer to Apollo at sunrise[108].

Jefferies was a natural mystic. His illumination came not through fasting or asceticism (which he condemned as 'the vilest blasphemy'[109]), nor through guide or guru, nor by any of the traditional paths to enlightenment. It came to him as a grace.

Nor was his attitude to nature solely mystical or aesthetic. It was rooted in the practical realities of the soil. The son of a struggling small farmer, a proud member of the yeoman class, he knew the harshness of agricultural life at first hand. His rural pictures are free from romantic idealization, the veil of pastoral idyll lurking in the imagination of most town-dwellers. To conclude, here is the dawn as depicted in the essay 'The Labourer's Daily Life':

> To rise at five of a summer's morning, and see the azure of the sky and the glorious sun, may be, perhaps, no great hardship, although there are few persons who could long remain poetical on bread and cheese. But to rise at five on a dark winter's morning is a very different affair. To put on coarse nailed boots, weighing fully seven pounds, gaiters up above the knee, a short greatcoat of some heavy material, and to step out into the driving rain and trudge wearily over field after field of wet grass, with the furrows full of water; then to sit on a three-legged stool, with mud and manure half-way up the ankles, and milk cows with one's head leaning against their damp, smoking hides for two hours, with the rain coming steadily drip, drip, drip—this is a very different affair.[110]

Jefferies paints a similarly bleak picture of the dawn in Chapter XXI 'A Winter's Morning' in *Hodge and his Masters.* The fogger's[111] dawn is very different from Felise's. He rises not to sunlight but to 'the pale beams of the waning moon'[112] that still cast a shadow on his cottage. His boots are stiff and hard, having been wet overnight. He eats some bread and cheese before stepping out into the frosty air. The furrows are white with ice, the stile crusted with rime. It is still dark but overhead the stars are losing their brilliance and Venus is shining. The cattle low as he enters the rickyard and mounts the haystack with a ladder and cuts out a truss of hay.

The fogger, like the milker and the carter, who also have to be up early, is often exposed to vile weather, wind and rain, furrows full of water, a flooded cowyard, a dripping haystack, slush and mire in the gateways, through which the milker staggers homeward under his yoke. Jefferies notes that the worst weather is often reserved for the last hour before dawn.

> In winter when the rain is driven by a furious wind, when the lantern is blown out, and the fogger stumbles in pitchy darkness through mud and water, it would be difficult to imagine a condition of things which concentrates more discomfort.[113]

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[107] Edward Thomas, *Richard Jefferies, op.cit.,* p.54.
[108] *The Dewy Morn, op.cit.,* p.18.
[109] *The Story of My Heart, op.cit.,* p.93.
[110] 'The Labourer's Daily Life,' *Fraser's Magazine*, November 1874, collected in *The Toilers of the Field* [1892] (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1894), pp.93-4.
[111] Short for fodderer: the man who feeds the cattle.
[112] *Hodge and His Masters* [1880] (London: Quartet Books, 1979), p.225.
[113] *ibid.*, p.228.

Mysticism and appreciation of natural beauty were allied in Jefferies to a social conscience that strengthened and matured throughout his life, until he had, in Q.D. Leavis's words,

> emancipated himself by nothing but the force of daily experience and sensitive reflection to a position of daring freedom from the ideas of his class, his age and his country.[114]

Jefferies wished his dawn for everyone, and by teaching his readers to see the world as he did, with the same intense clarity and exquisite tenderness of vision, bequeathed them 'sunshine and flowers'[115] in each lifetime now.

[114] Q.D. Leavis, 'Lives and Works of Richard Jefferies,' *Scrutiny*, March 1938, vol.4, p.441.
[115] *The Story of My Heart, op.cit.,* p.83.