

Prophetic Landscapes: Thomas Hardy and Richard Jefferies¹

Roger Ebbatson

Poor flourishing earth, meek-smiling slave,
If sometime the swamps return and the heavy forest, black beech and oak-roots
Break up the paving of London streets;
And only, as long before, on the lifted ridge-ways
Few people shivering by little fires
Watch the night of the forest cover the land
And shiver to hear the wild dogs howling where the cities were,
Would you be glad to be free?

Robinson Jeffers, 'Subjected Earth'

THE messianic or prophetic voice is characteristically muffled, undeclared or ambivalent in the period of modernity. According to Walter Benjamin, before 'prophecy or warning has been mediated by word or image it has lost its vitality'. Benjamin goes on, in terms peculiarly applicable to the thoughts of the Victorian nature writer, Richard Jefferies, 'To turn the threatening future into a fulfilled now...is a work of bodily presence of mind'.² The allegorical gaze, lit Benjaminian terminology, reveals both nature and history as a devastated terrain subject to inexorable decay, and this imaginative formation marks the powerful trope of landscape representation in Hardy and Jefferies. In this structure of feeling we may diagnose capitalism itself, in Benjamin's phraseology, as 'a phenomenon of nature whereby Europe once again fell asleep and began dreaming' in a process which, he claims, brings about 'a reactivation of mythic forces'.³ The prophetic revelation of sacred texts is replaced, in the secularity of late-Victorian England, by the more limited non-doctrinal revelation of the literary text, and specifically by the idiomatic intensity of landscape evocation and description. In a context characterised by the 'disappearance of God', Hardy and Jefferies seek, in places, to frame a concept of spiritual renovation. Such textual effects possess not truth value but aesthetic richness in a spiritually impoverished world. It is the intensity and constitutive metaphoricity of these descriptions which, therefore, replace the literalness of the sacred text. The polarities of landscape depiction in Hardy and Jefferies represent a new inflection of what George Steiner designates 'the inspired duplicity of the prophet's task'.⁴ Whilst a mystically projected text like Jefferies' *The Story of My Heart* (1883) is cast in that dominant prophetic syntax identified by Steiner as 'one of "future present", of anticipation that is also, at every historical moment, remembrance and tautology', celebrating 'that which is now as being that which is not yet',⁵ in countervailing texts such as *After London* (1885) or *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) Jefferies and Hardy explore those qualities, 'illusory or menacing', which are evinced, as Steiner observes, 'through human failure, through departure from the law'.⁶ It is this catastrophic failure which is mirrored in the dichotomies and distinctions embedded in the polarity between the epiphanic and blasted landscapes represented in this writing, a disjunction which stages a modern version of prophetic voicing. In his study of prophecy, Martin Buber stresses that the deity is always 'the God of the earth, the God of its history, of the biblical history of men', and he argues further, in terms resonant with implications for the trading of Hardy and Jefferies:

The important thing here is that the earth comprises the soil (*adaman*), and that this is dependent on man (*adam*), formed out of it, and looking to him to cultivate it, to 'serve' it. The earth is dependent on man not in a figurative sense but most actually. Man's rebellion brings the curse upon the earth. When man 'corrupts his way' the land is 'corrupted'.⁷

The prophet's role, Buber argues, involves 'the full grasping of the present, actual and potential'.⁸ Buber's distinction between 'a prophecy of salvation and a prophecy of disaster is germane to the function of landscape evocation in both Hardy and Jefferies:

In days of false rewriting a shaking and stirring word of disaster is befitting, the outstretched finger pointing to the historically approaching catastrophe, the hand beating on hardened hearts.⁹

In the duality between the effulgence of the Utopian landscape of the South Country and the desolation of the landscape of modernity staged in this body of writing, we may identify what Steiner designates 'the optative, future indefinite character of the Messianic prophecy'¹⁰ in its 'weakened' Benjaminian form.

Mikhail Bakhtin adumbrated the hypothesis that, during the classical period, 'the forms of drawing-room rhetoric acquired increasing importance', instantiating 'a new private sense of self, suited to the drawing-room'. As the process got underway, Bakhtin contends,

Even nature itself, drawn into this new private and drawing-room world, begins to change in an essential way. 'Landscape' is born, that is, nature conceived as horizon (what a man sees) and as the environment (the background, the setting) for a completely private, singular individual who does not interact with it.

Thus it is, under this Bakhtinian diagnosis, that 'Nature enters the drawing-room of private individuals'.¹¹ In the modern period, that is since the Middle Ages, Bakhtin's literary 'chronotope' designating time-space comes to dominate the reading experience: 'Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history'.¹² The literary representation of space in the nineteenth century reinforces the *Biedermeier* effect in response to the industrial revolution and the human domestication of nature. The *Biedermeier* assimilation of nature, as embodied in the overdetermined interiors of Balzac, Dickens or Ibsen, dialectically calls into existence a reversal of the nature/culture dichotomy which rejects enclosure both agricultural and horticultural in favour of a Ruskinian evocation of landscape space as freedom. The antitheses of nature and culture, rural and urban, simplicity and sophistication coalesce in a renegotiation of the spaces of earth under the impress of technology—witness the trains which Thoreau can hear in the distance at Walden Pond, or the counterblast from the Welsh quarry which disturbs the close of Tennyson's 'The Golden Year':

He spoke: and high above, I heard them blast
The steep slate-quarry, and the great echo flap
And buffet round the hills, from bluff to bluff.¹³

A reading of the literary landscapes of a semi-mythicised 'South Country' may be framed by Gaston Bachelard's proposal that 'We dream before contemplating', and that any landscape is 'an oneiric experience before becoming a conscious spectacle'. According to Bachelard, 'We look with aesthetic passion only at those landscapes which we have first seen in dreams'. The unity of a landscape thus 'appears as a fulfilment of an oft-dreamed dream'.¹⁴ The literary quest identified here was for a specifically redemptive space identified with and located in the English South Country, that mythical/real location or Foucauldian 'heterotopian' space spectrally inhabited by such figures as George Borrow, Richard Jefferies and Thomas Hardy, and then belatedly by W. H. Hudson and Edward Thomas. We may wish to define landscape here, in W. J. T. Mitchell's terms, as 'a process by which social and subjective identities are formed' in a potent instantiation of 'cultural practice'.¹⁵ Thus conceived, the landscape spaces prophetically framed in this instance become what David Matless, in his study *Landscape and Englishness*, designates 'a vehicle of social and self identity', functioning as 'a site for the claiming of a cultural authority'. As Matless observes, the 'ideal southern landscape is significantly highlighted as a mythic ideal contrasted with "disfigured" contemporary landscapes'.¹⁶

In his well-known essay, 'The Story Teller', Walter Benjamin annotated a process of mutism which, he claimed, had begun with the Great War. 'Was it not noticeable', he asks, 'at the end of the war that

men returned from the battlefield grown silent—not richer, but poorer in communicable experience?' And Benjamin went on to analyse the generational change which had taken place from the end of the nineteenth century:

A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body.¹⁷

We may trace here something of the transition from a sense, in the late-Victorian period, of the earth as a nurturing physical and metaphysical space towards the cataclysmic 'field of force' and blighted terrain of No Man's Land, taking as exemplary or symptomatic texts some key passages from Richard Jefferies and Thomas Hardy. The issue, then, is to propose a dialectical relation between the luminosity of the South Country and the degradation of modernity epitomised in the Western Front.

In Jefferies' 1883 spiritual autobiography, *The Story of My Heart*, the open or 'empty' space of the Wiltshire Downs enables him to project himself towards the earth in a potentially redemptive or prophetic gesture:

Lying down on the grass, I spoke in my soul to the earth, the sun, the air, and the distant sea far beyond sight. I thought of the earth's firmness—I felt it bear me up; through the grassy couch there came an influence as if I could feel the great earth speaking to me.¹⁸

Jeremy Hooker has appositely identified Jefferies' 'capacity to both ennoble and defamiliarise the lowly object, and also with near vision, to enlarge the world',¹⁹ and there is a curious juxtaposition in this writing of the transcendental—the response to earth, sun and space—and the quotidian—that 'dry chalky earth' Jefferies lets fall through his fingers, a heady combination which leads to the spiritual afflatus, the mystical union, attained as he hides his face in the grass. Later, in Sussex, he discovers 'a deep hollow on the side of a great hill, a green concave opening to the sea': 'Silence and sunshine, sea and hill gradually brought my mind into the condition of intense prayer' (SH, 31). These experiences lead to the annihilation of time in which he can affirm, 'Now is eternity; now is the immortal life' (SH, 39). Such writing, unlike the registration of social change in his fine radical novel *The Dewy Mom* or the sociological essays, is defamiliarising and transcendental, a kind of revelation of being. Jefferies' posture is clearly Transcendental in the technical sense, drawing upon the New England doctrine of the 'universal mind' or 'Oversoul', and the desire, as Emerson puts it, to do away with the 'preposterous There and Then and introduce in its place the Here and Now'.²⁰ In his seminal essay, 'Nature', Emerson adumbrates many of the concerns of Jefferies' autobiography:

Standing on the bare ground,—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God.²¹

Following the publication of *Being and Time* in 1927, Martin Heidegger expounded his later philosophical project as a wish 'to open up to the vastness and at the same time be rooted in the dark of the earth',²² and it is his thought, especially the 1936 essay 'On the Origin of the Work of Art', which may offer a productive philosophical framework through which to interrogate Jefferies' sense of earthly space. This is a form of writing, in Heideggerian terms, created out of nothing:

Truth is never gathered from things at hand, never from the ordinary. Rather, the opening up of the open region, and the clearing of beings, happens only when the openness that makes its advent in thrownness is projected.²³

If the 'Being of beings comes into the steadiness of its shining', then it is 'Upon the earth and in it' that 'historical man grounds his dwelling in the world' (BW, 162, 172). Jefferies seeks the clarification of Heidegger's 'earth', his ascent up to the downs bestowing access to Heidegger's famous 'clearing', an 'open centre not surrounded by beings': 'rather, the clearing centre itself encircles all that is', and beings, Heidegger postulates, 'stand within and stand out within what is cleared in this clearing'. 'In

the midst of beings as a whole an open place occurs. There is a clearing' (BW, 178). Indeed, Heidegger affirms what Jefferies and other writers of the late-Victorian period such as Edward Carpenter gesture towards: 'At bottom, the ordinary is not ordinary; it is extraordinary' and the truth is arrived at through a 'clearing of the paths of the essential guiding directions with which all decision complies', to the extent that, as Heidegger expresses it, 'Earth juts through the world and world grounds itself on the earth' (BW, 179,180). Just as Jefferies sinks to the earth, so Heidegger ponders the weight of the stone in its heaviness, and the way earth 'shatters every attempt to penetrate it'. All art, Heidegger claims, is 'in *essence, poetry*', taking place in 'the open region which poetry lets happen', so that beings 'shine and ring out' (BW, 172,197). The ground in which man 'bases his dwelling' Heidegger designates 'the *earth*', an open region in which, he proposes, "The Being of beings comes into the steadiness of its shining' (BW, 168,162).

Jefferies' vantage points on the Wiltshire or Sussex heights are similarly saturated with a sense of space, light and sun. In such writing, as Heidegger puts it in 'The End of Philosophy' (1969), 'Light can stream into the clearing, into its openness', but he goes on to insist that 'light never first creates the clearing': 'Rather, light presupposes it' (BW, 442). And Heidegger's citation from Goethe here is apposite to Jefferies' project: ' "Look for nothing behind phenomena"', writes Goethe, ' "they themselves are what is to be learned"' (BW, 442). In *The Story of My Heart*, Jefferies strives towards Heidegger's postulate that the clearing, in its 'free openness', will ultimately bestow 'pure space and ecstatic time'. There is 'No outward appearance without light', and 'no brightness without the clearing'. It is in that clearing that 'possible radiance' is to be found, that is, 'the possible presencing of that presence itself (BW, 442, 444, 445). Jefferies' strange spiritual autobiography, we may argue, 'lets the earth be an earth' in the sense that this writing compels us by the obscure and resistant weight of its language. Heidegger thus shares with Jefferies a sense of the earth not as a resource for agricultural or industrial exploitation but as a dwelling place which is 'sheltering and concealing' (BW, 172). Both writers seek out the clearing, the attainment of a 'lighting centre' which 'encircles all that is and which enables beings to be unconcealed'. Jefferies' late essays are deeply inflected with this concern for being, which produces, as in his essay 'On the Downs', an ecstatic, celebratory mode of responding to landscape space in tracing the effects of light on the sea and the hills. The mind, Jefferies insists, must allow itself to 'rest on every blade of grass and leaf, and he goes on:

Stoop and touch the earth, and receive its influence; touch the flower, and feel its life; face the wind, and have its meaning; let the sunlight fall on the open hand as if you could hold it. Something may be grasped from them all, invisible yet strong. It is the sense of a wider existence—wider and higher.

This sense of 'absorbing something from the earth' is 'like hovering on the verge of a great truth'.²⁴ Four years later, in his last illness, Jefferies was still seeking what he termed 'the Beyond', 'Soul-Life' or 'Sun-Life', again adumbrating a phenomenological world-view:

No theory, philosophy, religion, meets the labourer rough and red, the woman to the draw-well, the invalid on his bed, the omnibus driver: all speculation, they do not touch the real.²⁵

Yet the quotidian is ineluctably linked, in these moving final ruminations, with transcendence, 'The sun in silence rising over the sea' connecting Jefferies with 'a sense and a sympathy with some larger life'. This gives what he terms a 'great view of the greater earth—*putting soul—thought into the greater sphere*'. Although in his last reflections he feels 'utterly abandoned', it is the 'intense beauty and love of nature—every grain of sand',²⁶ which dominates these meditations:

I fetish Nature. Sea, sunshine, clear water, leaves. If I can see why not—if they cannot see I cannot help that—I see the sands and the stars, and subtle cosmical material far up, and feel through, and the more I touch these the greater grows my soul life and soul touch.²⁷

In his last note Jefferies offers a summation of his philosophical journey: there is, he avers, 'Nothing for Man. Unless he has the Beyond', and he concludes, '*I dream of Ideality*'.²⁸

It is this sense of aspiration for 'the Beyond' which Walter Benjamin examines in a gnomic section of 'One-Way Street' entitled 'To the Planetarium'. Here Benjamin suggests that what distinguishes ancient from modern man is 'the former's absorption in a cosmic experience scarcely known to later periods', and he goes on, in terms cognate with Jefferies' project

The ancients' intercourse with the cosmos had been different: the ecstatic trance. For it is in this experience alone that we gain certain knowledge of what is nearest to us and what is remotest to us, and never of one without the other. This means, however, that man can be in ecstatic contact with the cosmos only communally. It is the dangerous error of modern men to regard this experience as unimportant and avoidable, and to consign it to the individual as the poetic rapture of starry nights.

Such rapturous communion is not simply individualistic, 'unimportant and avoidable'; to the contrary, Benjamin avers, 'its hour strikes again and again', as was made manifest 'by the last war, which was an attempt at new and unprecedented commingling with the cosmic powers' in a form of degraded sublimity:

Human multitudes, gases, electrical forces were hurled into the open country, high-frequency currents coursed through the landscape, new constellations rose in the sky, aerial space and ocean depths thundered with propellers, and everywhere sacrificial shafts were dug in Mother Earth.

In this historical conjuncture, as the logical consequence of the industrial revolution, the 'lust for profit of the ruling class sought satisfaction' through this ecstatic union, and thus 'technology betrayed man and turned the bridal bed into a bloodbath'. In this catastrophic process, the ancients' rapport with nature is replaced by a different response, so that 'In the nights of annihilation of the last war the frame of mankind was shaken by a feeling that resembled the bliss of the epileptic'.²⁹

Edward Comentale has suggested that 'the attempt to establish a certain authenticity, a new perspective, a transcendent consciousness, depends upon the presence of some fallen other, some decadent or marked double'.³⁰ The 'ideality' which imbues Jefferies' late thoughts, and the potential of a pantheist sensibility in relation to landscape, space and earth was to be re-examined to powerful effect in Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), a text in which the paradisaical or metaphysical properties expounded in Jefferies' autobiography are as it were fictionalised in the experiences of Angel Clare and Tess at Talbothays Dairy only to be cancelled and reversed in the wasteland of modernity at Flintcomb-Ash. As she enters the valley of the Froom, Tess's 'hopes mingled with the sunshine in an ideal photosphere' (TD, 109),³¹ and she appears even to possess some of the afflatus or visionary intensity of Richard Jefferies, telling Dairyman Crick how, by fixing her thoughts upon a star, she can find herself 'hundreds o' miles away from [her] body' (TD, 124). It is in this setting that the well-known harp-scene brings an ecstatic courtship to a head:

Tess was conscious of neither time nor space. The exaltation which she had described as being producible at will by gazing at a star, came now without any determination of hers; she undulated upon the thin notes of the second-hand harp, and their harmonies passed like breezes through her, bringing tears into her eyes. The floating pollen seemed to be his notes made visible, and the dampness of the garden the weeping of the garden's sensibility. (TD, 127)

Hardy had already, however, adumbrated the inauguration of a quite different type of landscape, writing in *The Return of the Native* (1878) of the evolution of a taste for 'a gaunt waste in Thule':

The time seems near, if it has not actually arrived, when the mournful sublimity of a moor, a sea, or a mountain, will be all of nature that is absolutely in keeping with the moods of the more thinking among mankind.³²

Thus it comes about, in *Tess*, that the 'oozing fatness and warm ferments of the Var Vale' (TD, 151) give way, following Angel's rejection of Tess on the wedding night, to a landscape of exposure and suffering at the 'starve-acre place' of Flintcomb-Ash (TD, 277), where the rich potency of the Froom

water-meadows is reinflected as a landscape of naked aggression, 'almost sublime in its dreariness' (TD, 275), personified in the sexually predatory farmer, Mr Groby:

The swede-field, in which she and her companion were set hacking, was a stretch of a hundred odd acres, in one patch, on the highest ground of the farm, rising above stony lanchets or lynchets—the outcrop of siliceous veins in the chalk formation, composed of myriads of loose white flints in bulbous, cusped, and phallic shapes...the whole field was in colour a desolate drab; it was a complexion without features, as if a face from chin to brow should be only an expanse of skin. (TD, 277)

Here Marian and Tess are transmuted, 'two girls crawling over the surface' of the field 'like flies' (TD, 277). As Roger Webster has noted, the colouring and sense of 'indistinct and nebulous' light effects associated with the dairy are here 'reversed' so that 'hard forms or outlines replace the softness of the light and colour effects'.³³ The emphasis is upon space as an emptiness in which the labourers are exposed to the elements; as the narrator laconically remarks, 'to stand working slowly in a field, and feel the creep of rainwater, first in legs and shoulders, then on hips and head...and yet to work on till the leaden light diminishes', 'demands a distinct modicum of stoicism' (TD, 278). This vacant space is invaded by a type of premonitory natural sign—the arrival of Arctic birds classed as 'gaunt spectral creatures with tragical eyes' which had witnessed 'scenes of cataclysmal horror', scenes 'of a magnitude such as no human being had ever conceived' (TD, 279-80). Here and elsewhere in the Flintcomb-Ash sequence Hardy appears to reinflect Ruskin's 1884 lecture on the premonitory 'Storm Cloud of the Nineteenth Century' which elicits a 'Blanched Sun,—blighted grass,—blinded man', phenomena there interpreted as 'the physical result of your own wars and prophecies', an omen that 'the Empire of England, on which formerly the sun never set, has become one on which he never rises'.³⁴ On her first arrival at Flintcomb-Ash, Tess had enveloped her beauty in a 'grey serge cape' and 'whitey-brown rough wrapper' (TD, 272), and now, across the denuded and endless space the female field-labourers, in Hardy's bleak vision, 'trudged onwards with slanted bodies' (TD, 280), proleptically anticipating in posture and anguish Wilfred Owen's Great War soldiers, 'Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,/Knock-kneed, coughing like hags',³⁵ or Ivor Gurney's regiment, 'Bent, slouching downwards to billets comfortless and dim'.³⁶ Each of these literary figurations stages the way in which, in Adorno's resonant diagnosis of the administered society, 'mankind still keeps dragging itself along' in 'an endless procession of bent figures chained to each other, no longer able to raise their heads under the burden of what is'.³⁷ In a potent reinscription of natural space, the two young women 'often looked across the country to where the Var or Froom was known to stretch' (TD, 279). Walter Benjamin's notion of the 'aura' as 'the unique apparition of a distance', and his notation of its modern 'decay',³⁸ is movingly embodied in Marian's plaintive remark to Tess: "You can see a gleam of a hill within a few miles o' Froom Valley from here when 'tis fine" (TD, 278)—a moment reinflected in the youthful Jude's vision of Christminster as 'points of light' which 'gleamed' 'like the topaz'.³⁹

Ensuing on this bleak scene of exposure, the 'calvary of labour' of the steam threshing-machine enacts and stages the principle of mechanisation and the new relations of production which will transform the space of the landscape in conformity with the laws of capital and exchange. Whilst the field-labourers serve Vegetation, weather, frost, and sun' (TD, 315), the steam-thresher is serviced by the blackened engine-man with his 'strange northern accent' and his 'iron charge' (TD, 315,316). It is a relatively short step from here to the climactic scene at Stonehenge set in a landscape of 'open loneliness and black solitude' (TD, 378). Here on the Great Plain 'the whole enormous landscape bore that impress of reserve, taciturnity, and hesitation' (TD, 381) which, paradoxically at this prehistoric site, announces the onset of modernity with the arrival of the agents of the law. As the black flag is raised above Wintoncester Gaol to signal Tess's execution, the 'two speechless gazers', Angel and Liza-Lu, 'bent themselves down to the earth' (TD, 384) in a gesture which parodically or tragically reduplicates Jefferies' life-affirming posture in *The Story of My Heart*. Jefferies himself had also, in *After London*, already envisaged or prophesied the wasted landscape of modernity in imagining the disappearance of London under the great lake which, at its eastern end, becomes 'a vast stagnant swamp' exhaling a 'fatal' odour. In this dystopian vision the blackened water 'bears a greenish-brown floating scum, which for ever bubbles up from the putrid mud', and the scene is dominated by a low cloud which hangs ominously over the 'oily liquid', in a premonitory figuration of what has been designated the 'slimescape' of the Western Front:

For all the rottenness of a thousand years and of many hundred millions of human beings is there festering under the stagnant water, which has sunk down into and penetrated the earth, and floated up to the surface the contents of the buried cloacae.⁴⁰

In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Hardy focuses upon those issues—forces of production, class consciousness, base and superstructure—which inform the Marxist analysis of capital, and the entire Flintcomb-Ash sequence may be fruitfully placed in conjunction with some of Marx's reflections in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844. Thus the 'despotic demand' which the threshing-machine makes on the labourers (TD, 315) is a precise staging of the way, in Marx's writing, the worker's labour 'becomes an object, an *external* existence', 'something which is 'hostile and alien',⁴¹ It is just such alienation that leads to the recurrent harking back to a pre-industrial time, the older men talking 'of the past days when they had been accustomed to thresh with flails on the oaken barnfloor'—a time 'when everything ...was effected by hand-labour' (TD, 316). Here and in the earlier swede-cutting scenes Hardy meditates upon the issues surrounding human labour in the open landscape of Wessex, the experience of Tess and her fellow-labourers enacting Marx's contention that 'the more the worker by his labour *appropriates* the external world, sensuous nature, the more he deprives himself of *means of life*'.⁴² This appropriation leads towards the naked exposure of the swede-field, or of that 'wide and lonely depression' in the natural space of the Berkshire Downs where Jude acts ineffectually as bird-scarer, a space where the human culture and memory of the folk is obliterated:

'How ugly it is here!' he murmured.

The fresh harrow-lines seemed to stretch like the channellings in a piece of new corduroy, lending a meanly utilitarian air to the expanse, taking away its gradations, and depriving it of all history beyond that of the few recent months.⁴³

Such exploitation and representation of earthly space prophetically embodies the establishment and representation, within a generation, of No Man's Land. Men work, Marx argues, to convert nature into a world of objects. In looking at nature men see only 'the bitterest competition among plants and animals'. Men and women here form the link between the instrument of labour and its object. The natural space of the South Country, that is to say, is here the subject/object of labour, human forces stamping their impress upon the face of nature even in the arid uplands of Flintcomb-Ash. The swede-cutting scenes introduce a direct transaction between the human and nature in which exchange-value dominates, as it does not at Talbothays Dairy. At the dairy, the rustic group come to regard themselves, in Marxian terminology, as '*communal proprietors*' of the enclosed valley, members of the community which produces and reproduces itself by living labour'.⁴⁴ The sense of communal ownership in Talbothays, already undermined by the arrival of the railway in the valley, is shattered under the impress of the modernity which produces the 'utilitarian' empty space of Flintcomb-Ash, the 'vast concave' of Jude's bird-scaring, or the miasmic swamp of Jefferies' prophetic fantasy.

Hillis Miller has suggested that as a form the novel comprises 'a figurative mapping', tracing a space 'based on the real landscape, charged now with the subjective meaning of the story that has been enacted within it'.⁴⁵ In *Topographies*, he argues that Heidegger (and, we might suggest, Jefferies on the downs or Tess at Talbothays) 'is beguiled by the dream of a harmonious and unified culture, a culture rooted in one particular place', whilst in contrast Hardy's work demonstrates 'that such an apparent unity, even in rural cultures, is riven by divisions and disharmonies'. He adds that, for Hardy, 'the human predicament, even in relatively stable and unified local society is to be alone'.

⁴⁶ The juxtaposition of *The Story of My Heart* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, therefore, might be further interrogated in terms of the countervailing representations of landscape space, and the reading of these texts framed and problematised here by fuller consideration of the Heideggerian thesis. Miller is right to claim that Heidegger's topographical thinking 'cannot be detached from the complex of ideas about language, thinking, building and dwelling', ideas symptomatically expounded in the 1951 essay, 'Building Dwelling Thinking'. The crucial starting point for Heidegger here is his contention that 'Man acts as though *be* were the shaper and master of language, while in fact *language* remains the master of man' (BW, 348). The German '*bauen*, 'to build', originally signifies 'to dwell', so that,

Heidegger contends, 'To be a human being means to be on the earth as a mortal'—'It means to dwell' (BW, 349). But the modernising activities of 'cultivation and construction' predicate that 'dwelling' 'falls into oblivion' (BW, 350), and Heidegger seeks to relocate this sense of dwelling in relation to his fourfold terms, earth, sky, divinities and mortals. It is the latter who have the power to 'save' the earth by refraining from its exploitation: 'Saving the earth does not master the earth and does not subjugate it, which is merely one step from boundless spoliation' (BW, 352)—a process already underway in Hardy's threshing-machine scene or Jefferies' polluted inland sea. To preserve, to the contrary, 'means to take under our care' (BW, 353). In the second part of the essay Heidegger focuses upon the image or symbol of a bridge over a river, conceived as the essence of true building which 'enspaces' and 'gathers to itself in its own way earth and sky, divinities and mortals' (BW, 355). The construction of a bridge, in this argument, creates what Heidegger designates a 'locale', and locales are said to 'allow for spaces' (BW, 356). The German term for space, *Raum*, means 'a place freed for settlement and lodging', or for 'something that has been made room for': 'Space is in essence that for which room has been made' (BW, 356).

Heidegger concludes by positing that the 'essence of building is letting dwell'. He contends that '*Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build*', and illustrates his point by the example of an ancient Black Forest farmhouse:

Let us think for a while of a farmhouse in the Black Forest, which was built some two hundred years ago by the dwelling of peasants. Here the self-sufficiency of the power to let earth and sky, divinities and mortals enter *in simple oneness* into things ordered the house. It placed the farm on the wind-sheltered mountain slope, looking south, among the meadows close to the spring. It gave it the wide overhanging shingle roof whose proper slope bears up under the burden of snow...It did not forget the altar corner behind the community table; it made room in its chamber for the hallowed places of childbed and the 'tree of the dead'—for that is what they call a coffin there. ...A craft that, itself sprung from dwelling, still uses its tools and its gear as things, built the farm-house. (BW, 361-2)

We might contextualise this hymn to dwelling, to the human enclosure of domestic space, by recalling some of Hardy's interiors—for instance, the tranter's cottage in *Under the Greenwood Tree*, the Great Barn in *Far From the Madding Crowd*, or indeed the dairy in *Tess*. Traces of such 'dwelling' mark even the bleak field of Jude's bird-scaring, in which 'to every clod and stone there really attached associations', and 'echoes of songs from ancient harvest-days', 'of spoken words, and of sturdy deeds'.⁴⁷ Such a 'constellation' is no longer available to mankind, in Heidegger's diagnosis, because of the onslaught of modernity: building, he argues, 'never shapes "pure space"' (BW, 360), but the '*proper plight of dwelling*' goes back, he argues, to a period 'before the world wars with their destruction'. Man's existential 'homelessness' is the refusal, ultimately, of the summons to 'dwell' (BW, 363). Heidegger is proposing that the poetic encounter with nature is crucial to an authentic inhabitation of the earth. The sense of poetry insisted upon here is not an aesthetic luxury but a primary condition of that 'dwelling' which is threatened and undermined by contemporary technology. It is, in this argument, mankind who create 'a place for space by making sites and locations that surround themselves with a landscape', as Hillis Miller puts it.⁴⁸ The thinking is complex here and refers back to *Being and Time*, where Heidegger reads space as dependent upon time. Being, or *Dasein*, 'as temporality is ecstatico-horizontal in its Being' and thus 'it can take along with it a space for which it has made room'. Heidegger adds in portentous italics, '*Only on the basis of its ecstatico-horizontal temporality is it possible for Dasein to break into space*'⁴⁹—a knotted Germanic version of the spiritual afflatus of Jefferies' communing on the downs.

The organisation of space creates the landscape, in this argument—an act of creation dependent upon the notion of '*Raum*', founded in the notion of clearance. Hillis Miller glosses this by suggesting that the 'site organises space around it from a horizon', so that it 'goes out to make the border from which a space is cleared'.⁵⁰ But it may be that Heidegger's anti-metaphysical reading of space, with its resonant pre-echoes in Hardy and Jefferies, contains, as Hillis Miller notes, disturbing connotations in terms of the importation of 'the monolithic, one-fold, culture of a people (*ein Volk*) sharing the same language, laws, and cultures, and dwelling in one particular place'. As Miller asserts, 'Such

topographical assumptions would underwrite a uni-cultural nationalism'.⁵¹ Does the cultivation of a transcendental landscape space in late-Victorian England, therefore, dialectically call into being or prophesy the abyssal landscapes of modern technology and warfare? Certainly, it is impossible to overlook the reactionary undertones in *The Story of My Heart*, when for instance Jefferies longs for 'an iron mace' with which he 'might crush the savage beast and hammer him down' (SH, 80). Perhaps more ominous is the cult of Julius Caesar, conceived as the one man 'truly great of all history' who attained 'the ideal of a design-power arranging the affairs of the world for good' (SH, 65-6). We are, it may be, here not too distant from Heidegger's notorious invocation, in his rectoral Freiburg University lectures of the early 1930s, of 'the forces that are rooted in the blood and soil of a *Volk*', and his concept of a '*fierce battle*' to be waged by teachers 'in the National Socialist spirit', in a project 'to build a *living bridge* between the worker of the "hand" and the worker of the "head"'.⁵² The Führer, Heidegger suggested there, 'asks nothing of the people', only what he terms 'the will to the self-responsibility of the people', or 'the *Dasein* of our people'—in this way were the German *Volk* to 'find the greatness and truth of its determination'.⁵³ This entire structure of feeling, with its existential concomitants, forms part and parcel of an ideological position that Adorno would caustically define as the 'tragic Hitlerian pose of lonely valour' which, 'posturing as metaphysical homelessness', serves to 'justify the very order that drives men to despair and threatens them with physical extinction'.⁵⁴

The longing for a return to natural landscape spaces took the form of a response to the bourgeois experience of alienation in a mass society, but the premonitory possibilities of such a 'return' were persuasively laid bare in a 1937 essay on the Norwegian nature-novelist, Knut Hamsun, by a member of the Frankfurt School, Leo Lowenthal. Drawing upon Ibsen, Lowenthal argues that the 'path to nature' took the form, not of a flight from reality, but rather a trajectory towards liberation. However, in the late-nineteenth-century manifestation of this impulse of which Hamsun, a writer much admired by Heidegger, is an exemplar, Lowenthal argues that 'this new type of submission to nature is closely related to political submission', with the result that 'communion with nature is transformed from sentiment to sentimentality, and then into brutality'.⁵⁵ In bourgeois liberal cultural readings, nature is transformed 'by organised societal enterprise', Lowenthal suggests, becoming 'an object for scientific and practical control', whereas in the nature-mysticism embodied by Heidegger (or, we may postulate, Jefferies or Emerson), the individual 'consecrates his life in rapt surrender and even in mystical identification' to generate what Lowenthal designates 'a jumble of mawkish sympathies for both natural objects and spiritual difficulties', to the extent that Hamsun's world, in Lowenthal's critique, 'foreshadows the affinity of brutality and sentimentality' which would characterise the twentieth-century German war-machine.⁵⁶ In such a structure of feeling, as Comentale remarks, 'divine pattern concedes to the inhuman face of technological domination'.⁵⁷ Walter Benjamin would concur with this evaluation, noting how 'In the face of the landscape of total mobilisation, the German feeling for nature had an undreamt-of upsurge'.⁵⁸ The evocative and spellbinding conjuration of a transcendental 'rootedness' in the spaces of earth thus paradoxically prophesies its opposite, so that, with the onset of the Great War, in Benjamin's haunting diagnosis, the 'pioneers of peace' are 'evacuated' from these landscapes with the result that, 'as far as anyone could see over the edge of the trench, the terrain had become the terrain of German Idealism'. The allegorical gaze, in Benjaminian terms, reveals both nature and history as a devastated landscape subject to irresistible decay. As Benjamin puts it,

every shell-crater had become a problem, every wire entanglement an antinomy, every barb a definition, every explosion a thesis; by day the sky was the cosmic interior of the steel helmet, and at night the moral law above. Etching the landscape with flaming banners and trenches, technology wanted to rescue the heroic features of German Idealism...Deeply imbued with its own depravity, technology gave shape to the apocalyptic face of nature and reduced nature to silence—even though this technology had the power to give nature its voice.

War is, in this interpretation which resonates with our texts, 'nothing other than the attempt to redeem, mystically and without mediation, the secret of nature, understood idealistically, through technology'.⁵⁹ Both Hardy's imaginative juxtaposition of Talbothays Dairy and Flintcomb-Ash, and Jefferies' projection of the South Country and its inundation under the great lake, stage and enact

Benjamin's ruminative remark that 'nature is messianic by reason of its eternal and total passing away'.⁶⁰ As Esther Leslie argues in her study of the German chemical industry, the natural experience of the Benjaminian aura 'becomes increasingly a social experience that either excludes aura, or reweaves it according to false pattern'. Paradoxically, as Leslie argues, technology itself 'generated a sort of aura', 'on the battlefields of the Great War where chemical gases fuzzed up the Europe; landscape':

It destroys the vista of nature as a place of contemplation. In altering the rules of war and hazing up the battlefield something akin to aura, a haze, is reproduced, but its qualities are quite different: this is aura after aura. It takes its place alongside those other entities that generate not aura but fake aura, the rotten shimmer of the commodity fetish or untimely artwork. At the end of auratic experience, in modernity's new denaturing, is aura's reinvention as synthetic.⁶¹

In contemplating the transmutation of the visionary landscape of Jefferies or of Hardy's Vale of the Great Dairies into the abyssal spaces of modernity, it is worth recalling Benjamin's contention that there is 'no more insipid and shabby antithesis than that which reactionary thinkers' posit 'between the symbol-space of nature and that of technology'. Rather, Benjamin suggests, 'to each truly new configure new "images"'.⁶² This transmutation effect, from transcendence to obliteration, traces the contrast between being, permanence and the identical, and history, which is a movement of becoming. Historical knowledge—in this instance, the knowledge of war—is marked by a discontinuity and fragmentation born out of the opposing trope of being and identity, as Paul de Man has explained:

A consciously created *being*, whether it be a work of art or a historical fact in general, is unstable in its being, and it negates itself to be reborn in another *being*. The two are separated by the abyss of a negation (in organic language: a death), and the passage from one to the other is essentially discontinuous.⁶³

The 'new images' which Benjamin envisages being created by technology are thus ineluctably related to the immanence of natural space in the transcendental tradition. In the Great War the sacramental spaces of the late-Victorian and Edwardian South Country undergo a final catastrophic transformation into that No Man's Land where, for instance, Benjamin's fellow Freiburg student, Martin Heidegger, would serve as a meteorological observer:

Hideous landscapes, vile noises, foul language and nothing but foul, even from one's own mouth (for all are devil ridden), everything unnatural, broken, blasted; the distortion of the dead, whose unburiable bodies sit outside the dug-outs all day, all night, the most execrable sights on earth. In poetry we call them the most glorious.⁶⁴

Wilfred Owen's account points towards, not only some of his own work, but also the more expressionist landscapes of Georg Trakl's final poems; indeed, it has justly been said that 'Abendland' ('The West'), composed in May 1914, 'ends with lines which seem in retrospect to be a prophetic anticipation of the coming war'⁶⁵:

You great cities
Reared of stone
In the plains!
Speechless with dark brow
The homeless man
Follows the wind,
Bare trees by the hillside.
You far-flung fading rivers/
Fearful sunsets
In tempest clouds
Inspire mighty *dread*.
You dying nations/
Pallid wave
Breaking upon night's shore,
Falling stars.⁶⁶

It has been observed that in Trakl's later verse, composed before his suicide on the Eastern Front, nature 'far from being a secure refuge for men, is itself involved in the universal process of decay and destruction', so that many of the images function 'as prophecies of the actual destruction which was soon to be visited upon civilisation'.⁶⁷

As Andrew Webber has noted, in relation to 'Abendland', 'through the historical lens of the First World War and the textual lens of Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlands* (*Decline of the West*, 1922), Trakl's poem seems to assume a prophetic, apocalyptic character'.⁶⁸ The elegiac tone adopted by Trakl, that is to say, is modified by 'the *radically* forward-looking character' of his poetic diction.⁶⁹ Whilst 'Abendland' appears to reject the city of modernity in favour of the natural landscapes explored by Jefferies and Hardy, as Webber remarks, 'its anti-urban topography is profoundly conditioned by the experience of simultaneous dislocation...that characterises urban modernity'.⁷⁰ The five war poems composed by Trakl are prophetic in tone and replete with the imagery of ruin and desolation, but we may close with one instance, 'Im Osten' ('In the East'), a text in which the prophetic and ecstatic voice adopted in the nature rhapsodies of Richard Jefferies reaches its brutal and cataclysmic reversal in the ultimate desacralisation of the natural world:

A people's gloomy wrath is like
Wild organs of a winter storm
The scarlet wave of battle,
Of leaf-stripped stars.

With shattered brows, silver arms,
Night beckons dying soldiers.
In the shade of the autumn ash
The spirits of the vanquished sigh.

Thorny wilderness girds the city.
The moon hounds frightened women
From bleeding steps.
Wild wolves burst through the gate.⁷¹

¹ This paper develops and reinflects the argument first put forward in chapter four of my study, *Heidegger's Bicycle* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2006).

² Walter Benjamin, *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, tr. E. Jephcott and K. Shorter (London Verso, 1985), 98, 99.

³ Cited in John McCole, *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition* (Ithaca; Cornell University Press, 1993), 282.

⁴ George Steiner, *After Babel* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 147.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 148, 217.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁷ Martin Buber, *The Prophetic Faith*, tr. C. Witton-Davies (New York: Harper & Row, 1949).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 178.

¹⁰ Steiner, *After Babel*, 147.

¹¹ M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, tr. C. Emerson and M. Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 143, 144.

¹² *Ibid.*, 84.

¹³ 'The Golden Year', in *Tennyson: A Selected Edition*, ed. C. Ricks (Harlow: Longman, 1989), 210, ll. 74-6. For a reading of the proleptic qualities of this poem see Roger Ebbatson, *An Imaginary England* (Aldershot Ashgate, 2005).

¹⁴ Gaston Bachelard, *On Poetic Imagination and Reverie*, tr. C. Gaudin (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1987), 36.

¹⁵ W. J. T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994), I.

¹⁶ David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London: Reaktion, 1998), 12, 18.

¹⁷ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, tr. H. Zohn (London: Fontana, 1973), 84.

¹⁸ Richard Jefferies, *The Story of My Heart* (Dartington: Green Books, 2002), 18-19; subsequently cited in the text as SH.

¹⁹ Jeremy Hooker, *Writers in a Landscape* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996), 17.

²⁰ *The Portable Emerson*, ed. M van Doren (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 144.

²¹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature, Addresses and Lectures* (London: Routledge, n.d.), 15-16.

- ²² Cited in Rudiger Safranski, *Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil*, tr. E. Osers (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 3.
- ²³ Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. D. F. Krell (London: Routledge, 1993), 196; subsequently cited in the text as BW.
- ²⁴ 'On the Downs', *Jefferies' England*, ed. S. J. Looker (London: Constable, 1945), 94, 96.
- ²⁵ *The Notebooks of Richard Jefferies*, ed. S.J. Looker (London: Grey Walls Press, 1948), 230.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 233, 264, 280.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 283.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 290.
- ²⁹ Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, 103-4.
- ³⁰ Edward Comentale, *Modernism, Cultural Production, and the British Avant-Garde* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 4.
- ³¹ Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, ed. J. Grindle and S. Gatrell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); subsequently cited in the text as TD.
- ³² Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, ed. S. Gatrell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 4.
- ³³ Roger Webster, 'From Painting to Cinema: Visual Elements in Hardy's Fiction', in T. R. Wright, ed., *Thomas Hardy on Screen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 30.
- ³⁴ 'The Storm Cloud of the Nineteenth Century', in *John Ruskin: Selected Writings*, ed. D. Birch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 277.
- ³⁵ 'Duke Et Decorum Est', *The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen*, ed. C. Day Lewis (London: Chatto & Windus, 1967), 55.
- ³⁶ Ivor Gurney, 'Canadians', *Collected Poems*, ed. P. J. Kavanagh (Manchester: Carcanet, 2004), 143.
- ³⁷ T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, tr. E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 345.
- ³⁸ Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, ed. M. Bullock, H. Eiland and M. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2003), 255.
- ³⁹ Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, ed. P. Ingham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 17.
- ⁴⁰ Richard Jefferies, *After London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 37-8. On the 'slimescape' created by the Great War see Santanu Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), ch. I.
- ⁴¹ Karl Marx, Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 13
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 273.
- ⁴³ *Jude the Obscure*, 8.
- ⁴⁴ Cited in Alfred Schmidt, *The Concept of Nature in Marx* (London: NLB, 1971), 130.
- ⁴⁵ J. Hillis Miller, *Topographies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 19.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 55.
- ⁴⁷ *Jude the Obscure*, 9.
- ⁴⁸ Miller, *Topographies*, 241.
- ⁴⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, tr. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), 420-21.
- ⁵⁰ Miller, *Topographies*, 244, 245.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 253.
- ⁵² These phrases are drawn from three lectures of 1933-4, reprinted in *The Heidegger Controversy*, ed. R. Wolin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 33 ff.
- ⁵³ Cited in Jirgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, tr. F. Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), 157.
- ⁵⁴ T. W. Adorno, 'Negative Dialectics', tr. E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 89.
- ⁵⁵ Leo Lowenthal, 'Knut Hamsun', in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. A. Arato and E. Gebhardt (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), 320,321,322.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 326,328.
- ⁵⁷ Comentale, *Modernism, Cultural Production*, 96.
- ⁵⁸ Cited in John McCole, *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 179.
- ⁵⁹ Walter Benjamin, 'Theories of German Fascism', in *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, ed. M. W. Jennings, H. Eiland and G. Smith (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1999), 318-19.
- ⁶⁰ Walter Benjamin, 'Theological-Political Fragment', in *Selected Writings*, vol. 3, ed. H. Eiland and M. W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2002), 306.
- ⁶¹ Esther Leslie, *Synthetic Worlds: Nature, Art and the Chemical Industry* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), 226.
- ⁶² Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, tr. H. Eiland and K. McLoughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1999), 390.
- ⁶³ Paul de Man, 'The Temptation of Permanence', in *Critical Writings, 1933-78*, ed. L. Waters (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 32.
- ⁶⁴ Wilfred Owen, letter of 1917, cited in Jon Stallworthy, *Wilfred Owen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 159.
- ⁶⁵ Richard Detsch, *Georg Trakl's Poetry: Toward a Union of Opposite* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983), 60.
- ⁶⁶ Georg Trakl, *Poems and Prose*, tr. Alexander Stillman (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2005), 99.
- ⁶⁷ Detsch, *Georg Trakl's Poetry*, 122.
- ⁶⁸ Andrew J. Webber, *The European Avant-Garde* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004), 73.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.
- ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 82
- ⁷¹ Trakl, *Poems and Prose*, 125