"What one sees another sees": Synchronicity in the Juvenilia of Anna Kingsford and Richard Jefferies

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Behind the coupling attempted in what follows stretches a track long since laid by the leading figures in juvenilia studies today.[1] Thanks to the invaluable and pioneering work done by them or because of them on the early writings of the Brontës and Elizabeth Barrett Browning in particular, the pre-Victorian nineteenth century has deservedly drawn a good deal of traffic. If that traffic were to move a little further up the road, however, Anna Kingsford (1846–1888) and Richard Jefferies (1848–1887) would be waiting at the next junction; and it is there that the present essay felt the need to go. It emerges from an experiment aimed at identifying two young writers of the High Victorian years between whom there exist parallels of analogy and contrast no less richly revealing than those between the pair that in 1993, at the beginning of her book *Godiva's Ride*, Dorothy Mermin took to represent "the transition from Romanticism to Victorianism" (Mermin 3). For this, Mermin chose Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Charlotte Brontë. As she notes, both went without the advantages afforded to their younger brothers; but it is a measure of how much both nevertheless did for women's writing that, if we turn to a time only five or ten years after their deaths, it is possible to put a young female author with a young male counterpart and feel that like is being compared with like.

By the time Kingsford and Jefferies came to make their respective literary debuts, in the early and middle 1860s, not only women writers but child writers of either gender seemed to have a more secure foothold in literary culture than ever before. Part of the impetus for this came from the contents of perhaps the most celebrated parcel in nineteenth-century literature: the "curious packet … containing an immense amount of manuscript" from which Elizabeth Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, published in March 1857, extracted extraordinary revelations about the very large-scale literary project in which the Brontë children had engaged (Gaskell 62). Suddenly it was easier for those who believed that children could be authors to imagine the

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three best-known parcels of eighteenth-century literature, in Samuel Richardson's *Pamela: or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740), as filled not with the clothes but with the uncollected papers of Richardson's sedulously scribbling fifteen-year-old heroine. Suddenly it was harder for those who were sceptical to put any kind of minimum age limit on the act of authorship, for the Brontës had very emphatically reset the bar. The spring of 1857 also saw Margaret Oliphant's novel *The Athelings; or, The Three Gifts* nearing the end of its year-long run in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. In it, Oliphant told the story of a young writer—Agnes Atheling—who at the age of twenty managed to have her work published. In reporting and reflecting on this serialisation, five months after it had started, the Philadelphia-based *Godey's Lady's Book* emphasised the thrilling allure of the dream that Oliphant's novel was feeding:

> The first appearance in print is an era never to be forgotten by the young author. The first story or poem "accepted" by the editor of a periodical from some new contributor, what a tumult of hopes and fancies it awakens in the mind of the literary adventurer who has thus launched his or her little skiff into the ocean of authorship! Dangers are forgotten, difficulties vanish, impossibilities even are overcome—in imagination—and the happy aspirant for literary glory sees the gate of the temple of Fame swing wide to welcome a new genius to her honors and rewards. (Hale and Godey 463)

Even as those words appeared in print, in November 1856, two children were growing up in southern England who within a decade would not only repeat the feat of Agnes Atheling but do so in less time than she had taken. The first was Annie Bonus, the future Anna Kingsford, born in September 1846. The second was Richard Jefferies, born in November 1848. Both she and he were to make their first appearances in print, as writers of both poems and stories, before they reached the age of eighteen.

For the remainder of their careers, after those first appearances in print, little more than twenty years were left them. The interval between their deaths was even shorter than between their births. Jefferies died in August 1887, and Kingsford died in February 1888. From beginning to end, therefore, the courses of their lives ran nearly parallel. There was no documented crossing of paths (although circumstances conspired to bring both, at separate stages, to Brighton); but their aspirations and their artistic choices were always closely aligned. Both worked as journalists, both wrote fiction, and both felt moved to write at length about their ideas and beliefs. Kingsford was never known as a nature writer in the way that Jefferies was; and Jefferies's writing, for all its visionary leanings, did not invite the type of label—"esoteric Christianity" or "Christian Theosophy"—to which Kingsford's lent itself. That both have been added to the roll-call of English mystics, however (Kingsford by William Kingsland in 1927, and Jefferies by Gerald William Bullett in 1950), indicates considerable common ground between them. In some lectures that Kingsford gave in 1881 and that she then published in 1882, assisted by Edward Maitland, she exhorted her listeners and readers to redirect their attention from the

phenomenal to the spiritual, so that they could discover "substantial verities lying eternally within and beyond the range of our transient perceptive organs" (Kingsford and Maitland 127). Richard Jefferies was at that time writing (for publication in the following year, 1883) his spiritual autobiography, *The Story of My Heart*, which similarly urged its readers not to stop at the surface of the self but to explore both within and beyond. The grand end in view was acquaintance with—and access to—both "that inner consciousness which aspires" and "the immensity of thought which lies outside the knowledge of the senses" (Jefferies, *Story of My Heart* 144, 184).

1866: Approach and Aftermath

THE OPENING sentence of Jefferies's autobiography is startlingly specific about the first dawnings of awareness: "The story of my heart commences seventeen years ago" (*Story of My Heart* 1). "I was not more than eighteen," he insists, "when an inner and esoteric meaning began to come to me from all the visible universe" (181). The year was 1866, and the place was Liddington Hill in the North Wessex Downs. In Jefferies's life it was an experience so pivotal as to remain with him, and actually to gather intensity, until the skills that he would need in order to articulate it properly were in place.

If 1866 must therefore be reckoned "a crucial year in Jefferies' spiritual development," as his latest biographer Andrew Rossabi puts it (651), it represented just as great a leap forward for him in the professional sense. In March of that year, at the age of seventeen, and impelled by financial necessity, Jefferies started work on *The North Wilts Herald* (Rossabi 692–93). This was a weekly newspaper based in Swindon, which alongside his routine reporting allowed him to contribute a range of other items: short stories, most notably, and accounts of his rambles. Some were substantial items, spread over several Saturdays. By the end of the year, the material that Jefferies had had serialised in the pages of the *Herald* included three short stories and a couple of "Chapters on Churches," credited to "the Peripatetic Philosopher." This material, in all its salutary and surprising variety, could be seen as laying the foundations for Jefferies's future literary career. He learnt the discipline that—if *Ben Tubbs* (sic) *Adventures* is what it feels like, the author's earliest extant work (Rossabi 33) and possibly predating his first assignment as a *Herald* journalist by as much as fifteen months—would seem to have eluded him before. At twice the length to which *The Story of My Heart* would later run, and squeezed incongruously into a very prosaic exercise book (British Library Additional Manuscripts, no. 58826), *Ben Tubbs* is a tearaway tale taking its hero to a California obviously beyond the wildest dreams of the Wiltshire lad who wrote it.

It was not long before Jefferies progressed from exercise books to newspaper columns; and on the final Saturday of June 1866 *The North Wilts Herald* allowed its new cub reporter to spread himself over three of these, on page six of an eight-page issue. Most of the space that Jefferies on this occasion commanded was given over to a short piece of metaphysical fiction, "A Strange Story," which is discussed in the next section of the present essay; but to the left of it were two poems, "To a

Fashionable Bonnet" and "The Battle of 1866." Some deft rhyming partly redeems the otherwise flat-footed attempt at light verse that is made in the first; and the second faces up to the Parliamentary big hitters of the day ("Earl Derby brewed the storm, / Sent 14-pounders, 20-pounders whistling 'gainst Reform") with some booming fourteeners of its own. All three pieces were signed "Geoffrey," making this the first instance of Jefferies being identified as the author of a published work.

The 30 June edition of *The North Wilts Herald* was still hot off the presses when an Anglican High Church periodical called *The Churchman's Companion* brought out its latest issue. While purchasers of *The North Wilts Herald* could reckon on eight pages a week, *The Churchman's Companion* offered its readers eighty pages a month. The enclosing endpapers would regularly carry announcements advertising whatever books might be forthcoming from the publishers of the periodical, Joseph Masters, and this was where, on 2 July 1866, the following line appeared: "RIVER REEDS. Poems. Fcp. 8vo. Nearly ready." In August 1866, that "Nearly ready" became "In a few days," and by September 1866 the waiting was over: "Now ready, in fcap, 8vo., price 2s 6d. / RIVER-REEDS. / A volume of Poems." These were signs that, in the same summer that saw Richard Jefferies begin to build up his portfolio, the career of another teenage author was similarly striding forward; for the poems were by Annie Bonus. The volume was published shortly before she turned twenty. It preserved her anonymity, however, and what little biographical information it gave about the writer was entirely concentrated into the final adjective and noun of a dedication plainly prompted by the death in 1865 of Bonus's father: "TO YOU, / OUR FATHER IN PARADISE, / WHOM LIVING, WE DID DEARLY LOVE, / YOUR LITTLE DAUGHTER / DEDICATES THESE" ([Bonus] v).

Already, in fact, the young woman in question was well known to Joseph Masters—and to Felicia Skene, who in 1862 had embarked on a spell of twenty-eight years "as editor of the *Churchman's Companion*" (Malkovich 228). By the time *River-Reeds* was published, its author's association both with the periodical and with the publishers dated back at least three years. In 1863, as a sixteen-year-old, she had had a poem entitled "The Maries" accepted by *The Churchman's Companion* and earmarked for its July issue, though then "deferred till our number for August." In August it duly appeared, albeit with a misprint that required an Erratum notice in September: "The signature to the poem 'The Maries,' in our last number, should have been A. Bonus instead of A. Boncer." In November *The Churchman's Companion* was hailing the same A. Bonus as "a young and very promising author," not just of verse, but now of prose as well.[2] She had just made her début between hard covers with *Beatrice*, a fictionalised saint's life. The interest of this work extends far beyond the age of its author,[3] although—since she reportedly wrote it not weeks or even months before she gave it to Joseph Masters, but years before—that inevitably plays a part. In December, this time with the correct credit ("A. BONUS"), a further poem appeared in *The Churchman's Companion*: "S. Stephen's Death." In *River-Reeds* three years later, there would be room for this and room for "The Maries" as well ([Bonus] 30–31, 51–52).

Both the precocity and the versatility that Kingsford—as Annie Bonus—had first shown in 1863, and that she then emphatically confirmed in 1866, were curiously in keeping with her earliest beginnings; the family into which she was born lived just

a few minutes' walk away from Gerard Manley Hopkins's family in Stratford, London. Hopkins was two years older, and destined in some ways to become the figure with whom both she and Jefferies would have to try to keep up. The summer of 1866, when Hopkins turned towards the Catholic church, proved nearly as pivotal a period for them as for him. By the end of 1866 Bonus was breaking into the literary mainstream, with a story accepted by *Macmillan's Magazine*. ("The Flower Girl of Sicyon" appeared, unsigned, in its January 1867 number.) At the end of the following year, 1867, came her marriage, and the consequent subsuming of the name of Bonus under the name of Kingsford. Jefferies, meanwhile, would continue throughout this period to publish in *The North Wilts Herald*. When his most substantial serialised contribution—a history of Malmesbury—"sounds a theme already heard at the beginning of 'A Strange Story'" (Rossabi 743), it is as if to acknowledge that, for him as for Kingsford, the work done in the summer of 1866 had set a pattern for the literary endeavours of at least the following year and indeed for some time beyond. In particular, although both he and Kingsford became better known for their non-fictional outputs, there continued to the very end to be significant imaginative creation in the best and most distinctive writing of each. The post-apocalyptic novel *After London* (1885) demonstrates the power that Jefferies can pack into a narrative; the posthumous volume *Dreams and Dream-Stories* (1888) does the same for Kingsford.

River-Reeds and "A Strange Story"

"DIVERSE" and "reserved," both of which words are contained in its title anagrammatically, are two terms that might fitly describe Anna Kingsford's 1866 collection *River-Reeds*. Although the author's Christian faith forms a framework for many of the poems, either because they are based on biblical subjects or because they are born of the struggle to sustain belief, the volume exhibits the kind of commitment to variety that commonly characterises a young poet experimenting with her techniques both of versification and of description. Inhibiting the emergence of any distinctive style, however, is a tendency—also typical of a young poet so well-read as Kingsford was—to defer to the established poets of the day. Kingsford seems in places rather reticent about developing a personal poetic voice, despite the scope for this that seventy pages obviously afforded, and inclined to focus instead on ventriloquizing the voices of others.

Thus it is that the longest poem in the volume, "Doubting" (3–13), finds the poet apparently doubting her own unaided capacities at the same time as it shows the speaker doubting what Tennyson had tried to trust in *In Memoriam*: "that good shall fall / At last—far off—at last, to all, / And every winter change to spring" (909). For immediately Kingsford not only harnesses part of what was compelling about the early sections of *In Memoriam*—the death of the loved one and the graveside meditation—but, as if she were seeking shelter under Tennyson's skirts, combines it with the same tetrameters and the same envelope rhyming:

Here, where each evening, from the west
 Falls the last radiance, and strews o'er
 With garlands all the sacred floor,
They laid my darling down to rest.

Here, underneath the marble, white
 And calm and cold as her dear brow,
 She lies in death and darkness now,
Who was my only life and light. ([Bonus] 3)

This captures the atmosphere as well as the manner of *In Memoriam*, distant though the monumental marble may be from "the pleasant shore" by which Hallam is laid in Tennyson's poem (Tennyson 881).

It is not long before voices other than Tennyson's begin to be woven into Kingsford's verse. The sixth stanza of "Doubting" runs as follows:

Thou wast a flower fair and sweet,
 In my heart's garden reared with care,
 But in the fervent noontide glare
Didst fall and wither at my feet. ([Bonus] 4)

Kingsford here is recalling, but transposing, the main elements of William Tatton's poem "Babe Lilian," published in 1860: "In our hearts' garden there lives a flower, / Fair and sweet as the white wild rose" (Tatton 83). The ninth stanza of "Doubting" attempts a similar appropriation:

Beneath us lie the graves of men,
 The silent stars are overhead;
 The silent stars,—the silent dead,
And we, the living, stand between… ([Bonus] 4)

Those lines seem to be channelling William Walsham How, the author of a volume of verse which—like Tatton's—came out when Kingsford was a studious teenager. (This volume, *"Three All-Saints' Summers," and Other Teachings of Nature to a Busy Man*, appeared anonymously and bears no date; but in the second week of May 1861 an advertisement in *The Athenæum* described it as "just published.") One of the poems included in the volume is "Stars and Graves":

The silent stars are overhead,
 The silent graves below;
A dream between—how quickly fled! —
  Is all we know" ([Walsham How] 80).

Kingsford takes over the stars and the graves but again transposes the borrowed elements.

The polyphony of voices heard at the start of "Doubting" sets the pattern for what ensues. That "Doubting" is one of two poems in *River-Reeds* whose final words are "no more," and that in the volume as a whole there are no fewer than fifteen other instances of the phrase, may serve to underline Kingsford's interest in the same emotional territory that Tennyson began to stake out in 1830: "Oh sad *No More*! Oh sweet *No More*!" (Tennyson 161). She follows him in applying deliberately and repeatedly the long-established principle that the words "no more" are infinitely evocative because they "have a singular pathos; reminding us at once of past pleasure, and the future exclusion of it" (Shenstone 2: 187). Elsewhere, she follows where Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning had led. "In the Firelight" ([Bonus] 32–34) is a dramatic monologue in blank verse replicating the "your hand in mine" opening of the former's "Andrea del Sarto." The collection's title poem, "River-Reeds" itself (1–2), resembles the latter's "A Musical Instrument" in being simultaneously a tale of the riverbank and an exploration through metaphor and myth of poetic inspiration.

Both Barrett Browning's poem and Kingsford's focus on the reeds into which Syrinx was transformed and the sounds that were drawn from them. Kingsford's equivalent for the breath of Pan in "A Musical Instrument" is "the breeze that comes soft from the westerly sky" (1). That gentle blowing provides her poetry—still figured as a playing on the pipes—with its own origin myth. The thoughts that she is secretly harbouring, "far down out of sight" (2), grow into poems when the wind conjures music from them. She can then form them into a bundle to be offered to the reader:

> Reeds in the river! reeds in the river!
> My thoughts and my rhymes are like reeds in the river!
> Some that go past tread them down in disdain,
> But the winds of GOD's heaven that over them blow
> Shall presently wake them to music again,
> May be of gladness, or may be of woe!
>
> Reeds from the river! reeds from the river!
> O I bring you a bundle of reeds from the river!
> Fresh smelling reeds, newly gathered and green:
> I bring you a bundle of fancies and rhymes,
> Though I know that my gift is but lowly and mean,
> And fair are the flowers that bloom in our times! ([Bonus] 1-2)

The equation that those lines assume, the reeds with the fancies and rhymes, is of course the basis on which Kingsford has her entire bundle of poems taking its title as well as its point of departure from the poem placed first in it. That poem's advertised subject gives Kingsford a means not just of suggesting what sort of song it is that her *River-Reeds* constitute but of defining her own status as singer. She uses the green reeds in the river—downtrodden but then resurgent, and waving but not drowning as the stream of tendency seizes them—to paint a poignant and pertinent picture of herself, at the age of not quite twenty, as a thinking reed (Pascal's "roseau pensant") and as a

young shoot of individual talent working out how it might meet and merge with, or face away from, the onward flow of tradition.

More detail is added to the picture in the prose counterpart of "River-Reeds," a tale entitled "The Water-Reeds" that according to Kingsford's biographer can likewise be assigned to her late teens (Maitland 1: 7), but that came out in hard covers, as the third of four so-called "Flower-Stories," only in 1875. In it, "the tall green water-reeds at our feet" are treated as emblems of "the soul that abides in patience" (Kingsford, "Water-Reeds" 116). Green, says the Spirit of the water-reeds, is "the colour in particular of hope and refreshment" (123); and to the wind among the reeds, "which surrounds and supports her so mysteriously" (134), she gives a meaning that W. B. Yeats's 1899 volume of verse—taking *The Wind Among the Reeds* as its title—would amplify and make more mystical still. (During the 1880s, in time for the experience to contribute to *The Wind Among the Reeds* but of course too late for it to be reflected in either *River-Reeds* or the "Flower-Stories," first Kingsford and then Yeats both briefly belonged to the Theosophical Society.) The culmination of the tale is the Spirit's revelation that, "as the Water-reeds cannot utter their music unless they are stirred and awakened by the breath of the wind, so neither can the soul of man give forth its melody of itself alone, but must be moved thereto by the power of the Spirit of God" (134). Particularly if Kingsford wrote her prose parable about "the power of the Spirit of God" blowing over the riverbank at the same time as she wrote her poem about "the winds of GOD's heaven" doing so, it would appear that Jefferies was not alone in having been "not more than eighteen" when he felt "an inner and esoteric meaning" yielded up to him by "all the visible universe" (Jefferies, *Story of My Heart* 181). At a similarly early age, or even earlier, Kingsford felt the same: "I have always from childhood entertained a great fancy for finding parables in Nature. It has ever been my special delight to frame for myself stories and allegories out of the voiceless things around me, and to discover in the silent insensate life of flower, stream, or sea, lively images of the mysteries of God's spiritual kingdom" (Kingsford, "Water-Reeds" 115).

It is clear from this that, for Kingsford, the imaginative life of the child is as much to be celebrated as the silent insensate life of nature. That celebration extends even to the title under which, as she leaves her childhood behind her, she gathers the poems that it has produced: not "Water-Reeds" but "River-Reeds." The appeal of the latter in this context has partly to do with its teasing proximity to "reveries." If "statistics" can strike the ear of the wondering child as "stutterings" (Dickens 59), "river-reeds" might just as easily and just as appropriately be turned into "reveries." The dreamy atmosphere that this inspired mishearing spreads over the entire volume ties in with its attraction to liminal spaces (windows, riverbanks, seashores) and its interest in transitional times of the day, such as sunset or dusk, when the physical senses are subsiding and inner states are heightened. The faint but felicitous suggestion of "reveries" also serves to define as fugitive and visionary the impressions to which Kingsford considers herself, in so far as she resembles the reeds in the river, peculiarly and perpetually prone. As according to Virginia Woolf "a plant on the riverbed feels the shock of a passing oar and shivers" (59), so Kingsford's river-reeds vibrate in sympathy with their surroundings: "All the long day through they tremble

and shiver!" ([Bonus] 1) Finally, Kingsford's emphasis upon the creative potential of reverie continues a campaign in which, as Stephanie Schatz has very valuably shown, Lewis Carroll and the *Alice* books were at this time instrumental. Schatz demonstrates Carroll's opposition to a medical establishment that, in the years when Kingsford was growing up, became increasingly inclined to regard daydreaming in children (and especially in girls) as deplorable and dangerous. Indulging the habit might bring on mental disorders. Kingsford, fully twenty years before her *Dreams and Dream-Stories*, is already begging to differ.

Even as *River-Reeds* went to press, some of the most intoxicating reveries in the whole of English literature were unfolding west of London. In 1866, Richard Jefferies took to visiting Liddington Hill. As he recalled in his autobiography seventeen years later, he would lie down in a spirit of "deep reverence" (Jefferies, *Story of My Heart* 5–6) to become "lost, and absorbed into the being or existence of the universe" (9). Once, resting by a tumulus where he used to walk, he felt his thought slip back twenty centuries, in such a way as to abolish the future and the past and create an eternal present (33f). What Jefferies experienced then was so powerful that, before he felt ready to deal with it directly and in detail in *The Story of My Heart*, traces of it appeared in several previous pieces of writing. Rossabi points to passages of the same sort—in which either the visible scene or the history inscribed in it comes compellingly to life—from two years before, eight years before, and sixteen years before (Rossabi 469, 683–84, 742–44). The earliest treatment of all, however, is at the start of "A Strange Story." This story had to wait thirty years for its first appearance in hard covers, but *The North Wilts Herald* printed it across two columns on the sixth page of its issue for Saturday 30 June 1866.

"A Strange Story" leaves Liddington Hill behind, but only to move a few miles further along the Ridgeway Path (and across the Wiltshire-Berkshire border) to another Iron Age fort on White Horse Hill. As he gazes up at it, Gerald Fitzhugh experiences a phenomenon to which an untitled manuscript, tentatively dated by Samuel J. Looker to 1875, tells us that Jefferies himself was prone. Jefferies, calling himself "Hyperion," writes of conjuring "figures of history and romance" so potently in his fancy that they were "brought before his eyes" as living realities (Looker, *Beauty Is Immortal* 51). Gerald Fitzhugh also sees and hears across a "chasm" of centuries as vividly as he sees and hears what is immediately present; so he finds that the past has "rushed back" upon his mind ("Strange Story" 19–20). In his mental eye he sees "the forms of the ancient Northmen warriors," and the congruence he senses between the sunbeams that catch the dew now and those that struck the warriors' lances then serves "to render as naught the wide abyss of a thousand years." In the wind he hears "the shout which greets the advancing Saxons." There are literary echoes in the wind as well. Jefferies seems conscious of his proximity to Salisbury Plain, where Wordsworth—in a passage from *The Prelude* that Rossabi relates to Jefferies's impressions of Malmesbury—"had a reverie and saw the past" (Rossabi 743n31). Contributing even more directly to "A Strange Story," since the territory that it maps out tallies exactly, is Thomas Hughes's *Scouring of the White Horse* (1859), the story of a London clerk's excursion to the Vale of White Horse. The clerk, whose name is Richard, attends the festival centred on the cleaning of the chalk horse and finds out

about an area that, as Hughes later observed (Hughes, *Tom Brown* 15), "teems with Saxon names and memories." When Richard takes the train home, the figures associated with it—including King Alfred himself—begin to flit about in his imagination "in the oddest jumbles" ([Hughes], *Scouring* 199). It is a vision of Alfred and his troops coming back to "triumph over death, and hell, and ... Time" (201). Like "those great dead" in Francis Thompson's *Victorian Ode*, "They passed, they passed, but cannot pass away, / For England feels them in her blood like wine" (8).

The strange story that Jefferies has Gerald Fitzhugh going on to tell requires a frame, so it is both relayed and completed by his friend Roderick. Gerald having experienced what he terms a "conversion" (Jefferies, "Strange Story" 22) from scepticism to belief in the supernatural, it is a strange story indeed. Gerald tells it in order to persuade Roderick to accept prophecies, premonitions, "the 'second sight' of the Highland Seers" (21), and the ability of "the mental eye" (20) to see more than is apparent to the "mortal eye" (24):

> "Roderick, I see, like the majority of mankind, you are content to ignore that which you cannot understand, instead of seeking to unravel the mystery. You are acquainted with the written history of the human race, and you must be aware that in every age, in every clime, under every condition of life, mankind has tacitly believed in the existence, outside as it were of the material world, of an invisible power, an omnipresent, ethereal substance—how shall I give that a name that is nameless?" (20–21)

Dwelling as it avowedly does upon things supernatural and nameless, the tale that Gerald and Roderick eventually deliver amounts to a chronicle of two deaths foretold, as if Jefferies's thought had slipped forward a century and he had somehow contrived to relocate twentieth-century magic realism to the Berkshire countryside. Gerald Fitzhugh and a "*savant*" from what must be London—"some seventy miles distant" (29)—are seen by the wife of the local squire walking past the place where, one year later in the savant's case and seven years later in Gerald's, both will be buried. At the time they are seen, however, neither man is physically there. The squire's wife has therefore seen their wraiths; and such apparitions of living persons inevitably portend their deaths. The inset narrative, which is Gerald's part of the text, duly concludes with the fate of the savant. The death of Gerald then follows, at the very moment that was prophesied, in Roderick's frame narrative. At this point the veranda from which Gerald falls dissolves into the vault in which he is laid, the inset story spills over into the frame, and a story that began with visions of past violence ends with a vision of the future lethally fulfilled. Jefferies engineers an ending whose artistry is all the more remarkable in view of the loose ends he had left in *Ben Tubbs Adventures*.

For Andrew Rossabi, "A Strange Story" is very much of its time and "shows the influence of the sensation novels of Wilkie Collins and Mrs Braddon" (708). Even more likely to have rushed back upon Jefferies's mind as he wrote the story, however, is Edward Bulwer-Lytton's novel of the same title—which Dickens had installed in *All the Year Round* (directly after his own *Great Expectations*) for a seven-month run

beginning on 10 August 1861, and which had then appeared in book form in 1862. Just as Gerald Fitzhugh in Jefferies's "Strange Story" is a former sceptic who proclaims his conversion to belief in the supernatural, so Bulwer-Lytton's *Strange Story* is narrated by a "self-boasting physician, sceptic, philosopher, materialist" (2: 36) who at first dismisses phenomena such as "the gift which the Scotch call second sight" (1: 193) but subsequently has to shift his ground. He is seen to have "fled from the commonplace teachings of Nature, to explore in her Shadow-land marvels at variance with reason" (2: 379). Accordingly, the novel is filled with omens, visions, and presentiments. It examines the proposition that we may sometimes have vouchsafed to us sights as yet unseen by any, or else seen by others either long ago or far away. Its central chapter, the forty-fifth out of a total of eighty-nine, contains extensive discussion of these "coincidences." "What one sees another sees, though there has been no communication between the two" (2: 55).

Jefferies's preoccupation with the same phenomena in "A Strange Story," which ends by throwing at us "one question: Reader, what is a coincidence?" (34), is either a further coincidence or evidence of some indebtedness to what Bulwer-Lytton had written. At the same time, "A Strange Story" also reads like a prefiguring of what Anna Kingsford would later write. Together with her companion and collaborator Edward Maitland, Kingsford accepted and explored the paranormal—including thought transfer—and she incorporated those interests into weird tales that might easily pass themselves off as written by the same hand as "A Strange Story." In her *Dreams and Dream-Stories*, the first of the stories is "A Village of Seers," which deals with clairvoyance as a blind man's recompense for the loss of his physical sight. He becomes capable of seeing, not with his "outward eyes" (Kingsford, "Village of Seers" in *Dreams* 98) but "with the inward senses of the spirit": "The power of interior vision came upon him in sleep or in trance, precisely as with the prophets and sybils of old, and in this condition, sometimes momentary only, whole scenes were flashed before him, the faces of friends leagues away became visible, and he seemed to touch their hands" (99). This "seeing gift" (115) is shared with the dumb animals that supply the story with its climax: the rescue of a lost child by clairvoyant dogs. "A Village of Seers" originally appeared in the December 1885 edition of a monthly magazine, nearly twenty years after Jefferies had likewise based a short story upon clairvoyance. Jefferies himself at the end of 1885 was still very much a writer of fiction, having published *After London* earlier that year; but principally, by now, he was a nature writer. His latest publication was a collection of essays entitled *The Open Air*. "Another charming volume," one reviewer would term it, "from the singer of the woods and open ways" ("General Literature" 304).

Critical Reception

BEFORE Jefferies could hope for any small favours from the periodical press, some were shown to Kingsford. In the week of her twentieth birthday, a paragraph in *The Athenæum* noticed *River-Reeds* as a "little volume of poems, by a lady," that in varying degrees exhibit promise. Who exactly the "lady" was is hidden from this reviewer;

but, since Kingsford's dedication points to somebody young, the review concentrates less on applauding what is already achieved than on gauging potential for the future. It commends *River-Reeds* as follows:

> The author has a pretty knack of versification; her lines are polished, her language is well chosen, and she has some power of thought; so that we cannot doubt her capabilities of producing some work of greater pretension than the present. ("New Poetry")

"Little" and "pretty" also occur, a fortnight later, to the reviewer for *John Bull*. Here, *River-Reeds* is said to be

> a pretty little volume of gracefully written verses on miscellaneous subjects, which will give pleasure to most readers …. the writer possesses no small skill in the art of word painting, and those who love such pictures will do well to possess themselves of this little book. ("Literary Review: Poetry")

The assumption here is that the author's appeal must be limited, for the time being, to connoisseurs of the minor and devotees of the slight.

Once the weeklies had had their say about *River-Reeds*, it fell to the monthlies to follow suit. Naturally, the journals with most time and space for books from Joseph Masters were those that shared the same publisher. *The Ecclesiastic* was first to take up position, and in its issue for November 1866 described *River-Reeds* as

> a collection of graceful verses, some of deep pathos, some of high devotion, and all finished and poetical. Occasionally the deep problems of human thought are touched upon, but it is in a comfortable, *débonnaire* way, not as if the writer's mind had an experimental knowledge of the doubts and struggles described, and thus the poems of this kind are less real than the lighter ones in the volume, whose great charm is their soft pathos and tenderness. ("Poems by Plumptre and Others" 518)

Six months later came the turn of *The Churchman's Companion* itself, which reviewed the volume with a privileged prior knowledge of the writer's identity and readily conceded both the technical skill and the slight lyric grace. At the same time it felt compelled to administer a reproachful bite to the hand that formerly fed it:

> River Reeds (Masters) is a small collection of poems containing the germ of very decided genius which will make itself known in future years if the promise of the present is fulfilled. When that time of mature judgment has arrived the authoress will probably greatly regret the publication of various of the poems in this volume. It is with no surprise, though of course with regret that we perceive, by

> the strong internal evidence of her writings, that she has not passed unscathed through a course of Germanizing authors who have suggested baneful doubts to a naturally devotional mind, but it must be a very young writer indeed who could venture to patronize the Christian faith after the manner of the following lines:
>
> > Nor let us in our pride be rathe
> > To crush the hopes we deem unwise,
> > For much of wholesome sweetness lies
> > In the fair flower of Christian faith.
>
> The poems untainted by this fashionable scepticism are for the most part of undoubted merit, full of rich thought, and very harmonious and musical. ("Reviews and Notices" 468)

Even as the reviewer commends her, therefore, the aspiring "authoress" is treated to a long lingering taste of the same condescension with which she is being charged.

Attitudes evolved, and the tendency to patronise faded, but so slowly that even after three decades it was hard to detect any difference. In 1866, condescension about the youthful writings of Anna Kingsford was licensed by the expectation that better work would probably follow. In 1896, the knowledge that what he had subsequently produced was indisputably superior became a licence to be condescending about the youthful writings of Richard Jefferies. The classic example of wisdom after the event is the compilation made in that year by Grace Toplis: *The Early Fiction of Richard Jefferies*. Toplis even evinces embarrassment about what she is exhuming. She tends to equate "early" with "crude," and to use "boyish" and "youthful" as limiting terms (viii–ix). She draws on Walter Besant's *Eulogy of Richard Jefferies* (1889), but in respect of Jefferies's early fiction the closest approach to "eulogy" that she permits herself is the capitalised "APOLOGY" with which, in its heading, her prefatory statement feels bound to couple its "INTRODUCTION" (vii). The reason is that the young Jefferies was misguided, even deluded. He had not yet discovered what he wanted to say, nor found the tree up which he wanted to bark. He "fondly fancied that it was through his fiction that Fame would come to him" (viii). The disinterring of "these almost forgotten writings" will therefore be met with "inevitable criticism" (vii), Toplis thinks, except from the type of "book-lover [who] yearns to make his collection complete" (x); but awareness of the better things to which Jefferies then proceeded—notably "the gorgeous word-painting which has placed him with the Masters" (viii)—entitles him to some forbearance, and his earliest efforts may then invite our "loving toleration" (xv). Their main claim to our attention, according to Toplis, is as "*intellectual curios*" (x). That is, they serve to measure the huge advances made subsequently. Thus it was that Jefferies's early work, which when it first appeared had received no reviews at all, was considered worth reprinting. At best, the juvenilia might provide the occasional "whisper" or "faint indication" (xi) of the heights which Jefferies would later reach.

That presence in an author's early writings of the "germ" of mature genius, as *The Churchman's Companion* had expressed it, is obviously easier to pick up with the

benefit of hindsight. However, even fifty or sixty more years of hindsight than Toplis had had could not persuade Jefferies's strongest twentieth-century advocates to see the imaginative writing carried by *The North Wilts Herald* as in any way continuous with the defining achievements that came long after. Samuel J. Looker dismissed Jefferies's juvenilia as "melodramatic trash quite alien from the true bent of his mind" (*Jefferies Companion* 4). W. J. Keith found little to say about "a number of early and worthless short stories" (18). On Kingsford's juvenilia, meanwhile, there was complete critical silence. Initially, it had appeared that the growing interest in Jefferies might revive interest in Kingsford. When Toplis brought out *The Early Fiction of Richard Jefferies*, at least, there were some signs of overlapping. The critic and animal rights campaigner Henry Stephens Salt (1851-1939), for example, had by 1896 written both about Jefferies and about Kingsford (though not with unqualified admiration about either). In the event, none of the modest attention posthumously paid to Kingsford extended to her early writings. Unlike Jefferies's, and despite the respectable number of reviews that they had attracted when they first appeared, these were never reprinted.

As the divide that time has made between the reputations of Jefferies and of Kingsford continues to widen, however, it may behove us to look back at both writers' beginnings. 1866 could be considered the *annus mirabilis* of their emergence. As the summer of that year turned into autumn, they already both had publications to their names in prose fiction and in poetry too. What kind or kinds of writing they would go on to prioritize could not have been predicted, and which of the two young writers would outshine the other lay equally open to question. Each one at that time, he with "A Strange Story" and she with *River-Reeds*, was a teenager paying studied stylistic homage to several of the leading writers of the day; yet both were determined, as soon as they could, to set sail alone. Of all the skiffs that young Victorian authors ventured to launch into what *Godey's Lady's Book* termed "the ocean of authorship," no other pair slid so similarly down the slipway.

NOTES

[1] My essay owes in addition a debt that it cannot properly repay: to the necessarily anonymous reader by whose suggestions its discussion of both Kingsford and Jefferies, but especially the latter, is informed.

[2] The poem appeared on p. 106 of *The Churchman's Companion*, vol. 34. The other specified mentions of "The Maries" and of Annie Bonus were also all made in vol. 34: p. 80 (July 1863); p. 238 (September 1863); and p. 400 (November 1863).

[3] See Peter Merchant, "Magnifying" and Merchant, "Double."

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