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Towards the Post-Pastoral: A New Materialist Reading of Richard Jefferies's *Amaryllis at the Fair*

by Adrian Tait



Abstract

Published just before Richard Jefferies's death in 1887, *Amaryllis at the Fair* embodies many of the defining features of the classical pastoral, including a backward glance to a “golden age” of rural prosperity, an Arcadian setting, the themes of retreat, renewal, return, and amorous upheaval. If, however, we re-examine the novel with a new materialist attentiveness to the entanglement of humans and nonhumans, mindful that matter is itself agential, we begin to recognise some of the myriad ways in which the novel also exceeds, contests, or contradicts its own pastoral identity. Notably, the novel demonstrates its attentiveness to the “little things,” and like new materialism itself, it posits them not as inert and passive or as mere manifestations of the subordinate realm of the “other,” but as an agential and co-constitutive presence. In so doing, the novel opens up an oppositional, ecocritical response to the newly emergent condition of industrial modernity that defines the wider context of Jefferies's work. Here, the pastoral in the novel operates as both a pantheistic challenge to secularisation and as a proto-ecological challenge to the risk experienced by industrial societies. In other words, the pastoral is more than mere literary whimsy or idealised obfuscation, but mutable, adaptive, and agential, a material-discursive formation whose enduring relevance and power to command our interest is a function of its rootedness in the realities that modernity might disavow but can never finally escape.

Keywords: Richard Jefferies, *Amaryllis*, new materialism, agency, industrial modernity, materiality



About the Author

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Introduction

Richard Jefferies (1848–1887) is today best known as a nature writer and essayist, but he also wrote a number of novels. Most are now forgotten. Yet these novels are themselves fascinating responses to the changing nature of human existence at a time of unparalleled industrialization and urbanization. Jefferies's novel *Amaryllis at the Fair* is a (perhaps surprising) case in point. Published just before his death, *Amaryllis* embodies many of the features of the idealized, classical pastoral, including a backwards glance to a “Golden Age” of rural prosperity (Gifford 1999, 17), an Arcadian setting (18–19), and the theme of amorous upheaval (17), features that seem to have little bearing on the gritty and polluted realities of the novel's historical moment. If, however, we re-examine the novel with new materialism's attentiveness to the entanglement of human and nonhuman worlds, mindful that (as Karen Barad argues) matter is itself vital, dynamic, and agential (2007, 33–35), it becomes possible to identify some of the myriad ways in which the novel contests its own pastoral identity, most notably by contradicting the conventional pastoral insistence on its own literary artificiality. “I have set myself the task to describe a bit of human life exactly as it really is,” declares the novel's narrator (Jefferies 1939, 272), and as the critic W. J. Keith has pointed out, this “insistence upon truth and reality” has “a profound effect not only upon the ‘matter’ of the book, but also upon the characters” (1965, 148).

That effect is perhaps most apparent in the way the novel presents “matter” itself: *Amaryllis* is singularly attentive to the “little things” (Jefferies 1939, 257), from the wear on wainscot to the feel of dew-soaked grass, or the right way in which to build a five-bar farm gate. Moreover, and as if anticipating Barad's theory of “agential realism,” the novel

posits those things not as “little”—as inert and passive “stuff” or as mere manifestations of the subordinate realm of the “other”—but as a radically alive and co-constitutive presence (Barad 2007, 32–33). In Jefferies’s novel, they form an emphatic and dynamic part of a healthy, whole, but also meaningful existence, in which the interplay (or, after Barad, “intra-actions”) between the material world and the humans who inhabit it—humans who are themselves made up of matter—form the basis for a viable, sustainable existence (Barad 2007, 33). Matter matters, and by acknowledging the importance and value of the material world, and in making this leap from the ontological to the ethical, the novel opens up an oppositional, ecocritical response to the newly emergent condition of industrial modernity that defines its wider material-discursive context.¹

In so doing, *Amaryllis* also negotiates a shift in the nature of the pastoral itself. As Leo Marx has argued, “the wholly new conception of the precariousness of our relationship to nature is bound to bring forth new versions of pastoral” (1992, 222); mindful of and responsive to the threatened reality of the nonhuman world, and human intra-actions with it, *Amaryllis* looks forward to what Terry Gifford has influentially defined as the post-pastoral (1999, 146–74). The post-pastoral posits itself not as literary whimsy, allegory, or idealised obfuscation, but as a meaningful intervention in the “material-social relations of the world” (Barad 2007, 35).

How, then, does this essay make its case for the innovative nature of Jefferies’s neglected novel? As Owen Schur has argued, the pastoral is an “eminently dialectical genre” (1989, 5), responsive to its historical moment, and always therefore mutable; *Amaryllis* itself demonstrates the pastoral’s inherent flexibility and adaptability. But as Schur also argues (and Gifford’s discussion of the pastoral and post-pastoral underlines), it is possible to identify features that have over time characterised the pastoral—and as the next section of the essay discusses, defining a Victorian pastoral helps us better understand how *Amaryllis* builds on or departs from it.

Amaryllis and the Victorian Pastoral

Schur identifies five main characteristics of a Victorian pastoral, beginning with the undisguised “division between . . . the sophisticated . . . speaker and the ‘naïve’ subjects whom he describes within the pastoral world” (1989, 2). Then, there is a contrast between the bucolic and the urban, the country and the city, which is also a tension between “rural simplicity and cosmopolitan sophistication” (5). Thirdly, there is a related theme of retreat and return, as the subject seeks an escape from the pressures of city life in a pastoral oasis, or *locus amoenus* (“lovely place”) (10). Linked to this retirement theme, there is also a distinctive playfulness about the pastoral, which distinguishes it

from the georgic, with its earnest investment in the working world of farming life (3). The world of the pastoral is, by contrast, a world of natural plenitude and abundance, in which hard work may be counterbalanced by leisure and a playful awareness of how to enjoy life. This playfulness also extends to the light-hearted tone of the pastoral itself. While the pastoral posits itself as an entertainment, however, it also acts as a means of working through life's problems, reshaping itself to fit the demands of its historical moment (3–4), and creating an ideal, imaginative space within which to respond (4, 8).

This notwithstanding, Schur insists, the pastoral explores “these problems through the highly self-conscious play of language;” indeed, the “pastoral’s principal mode of understanding and, in fact, its principal subject is language itself” (1989, 5). This contention points to a final defining characteristic of the pastoral, which relates to its emphasis on the “good place,” a *locus amoenus* defined by “the simplicity of its natural setting” (10). According to Schur, the *locus amoenus* is a rhetorical trope (10), which plays its part within a construct (the pastoral) that is itself self-consciously literary in origin and execution: part of the playfulness of the pastoral relates to this knowingness. There is, adds Schur, an important corollary to that playful self-consciousness: language takes primacy. “Pastoral singers insist that the trees, brooks, and shady bowers they sing about are not simply created by words; the substance of these natural objects is neither more nor less than words themselves” (11). In other words, the pastoral denies reality (the rural retreat to which it refers) even as it insists on its own reality (as a form of literary artifice). In so doing, it marks a deeper division, between culture and a subordinate nature.

From an ecocritical perspective, this is perhaps the most problematic aspect of the pastoral, but it is at this point that Jefferies’s own novel begins to depart from Schur’s framework definition of a Victorian pastoral. Instead, Jefferies’s narrative insists on the (agential) reality of the world to which it refers; in *Amaryllis*, the pastoral is not conceived of as literary artifice, but as itself formative, influential, and agential.

Nonetheless, *Amaryllis at the Fair* is deeply indebted to the pastoral, as its title itself suggests: Amaryllis is a character in both Theocritus’s *Idylls* and Virgil’s *Eclogues*, the two works with which the pastoral may be said to originate. In the third of Theocritus’s *Idylls*, for example, Amaryllis is serenaded by the shepherd Tityrus, while “fair Amaryllis” is invoked in Virgil’s *Eclogues* (2009, 3). Jefferies’s choice of name for his heroine points to a number of other correspondences between the novel and the features Schur identifies. As Schur argues, the first characteristic of the pastoral is a tension between sophisticated speaker and naïve subject, a tension which also relates to the second characteristic of the pastoral, the contrast between country and city. In *Amaryllis*, this contrast is reflected in

the way the novel's narrator presents and then ironizes a representative range of rural characters, from farm-worker up to landed gentry. For instance, there is "big Jack Duck" (Jefferies 1939, 230) farm-hand and Amaryllis's prospective suitor, a "mountain of slowness and stupidity" (230), with "a round, hard head, which you might have hit safely with a mallet" (228). Next, there is a farmer, Iden, Amaryllis's beloved father, who tirelessly works the land at Coombe Oaks yet never seems to escape from debt; as the narrator remarks, "he wore the raggedest coat ever seen on a respectable back" (202–3). Then, there is Old Iden, the grandfather of the family, and a baker who is reputed to keep a fortune in guineas "in an iron box under his bed" (234). Through him, the reader encounters the Pamments, the local landed gentry, and "young Raleigh Pamment, the son and heir" (268), a man remarkable only for "his great power to eat, drink, and sleep" (269). All these figures are gently ironized. Perhaps the only figure whom the narrator treats kindly is Amaryllis, who herself possesses "an eye sharp to detect failings or foolishness" (230): to her, for example, the Pamments are mere "medieval tyrants" (265).

The narrator is similarly critical of other aspects of rural life: the fair is the highlight of the year, but with its "trumpeting and tooting," the narrator finds it stale and predictable (Jefferies 1939, 260); by contrast, "the best entertainment in the world is a lounge in London streets" (270). As the novel progresses, however, the narrative tone shifts, as we are introduced to Alere Flamma, "artist, engraver, bookbinder, connoisseur, traveller, printer, Republican, conspirator, sot, smoker, dreamer, poet, kind-hearted, good-natured, prodigal, shiftless, man of Fleet Street, carpet-bag man, gentleman shaken to pieces" (315). Alere introduces another of the pastoral's defining characteristics: the "retirement theme" (Schur 1989, 3), as the city-dweller seeks to escape the pressures of an urban existence. "Every two or three years, when he felt himself toppling over like a tree half sawn through, Alere packed his carpet-bag, and ran down to Coombe Oaks" (311–12). Alere's arrival at Iden's farm marks a further shift, towards the playfulness that is itself another of the pastoral's defining characteristics. Work goes by the wayside: instead, Alere, Iden, and Amaryllis "talked on and on ... till 'a month passed away,' and still they were talking" (309). "For there is nothing so good to the human heart as well agreed conversation," observes the narrator, "when you know that your companion will answer to your thought as the anvil meets the hammer, ringing sound to merry stroke; better than wine, better than sleep, like love itself—for love is agreement of thought" (309).

What their idle amusements assume, of course, is an equally felicitous place in which to indulge themselves: it assumes the *locus amoenus* to which Schur refers—and at Coombe Oak, Iden has fashioned just such a place. "Flowers, and trees, and grass, seemed to spring up wherever Iden set down his foot," observes the narrator: "fruit and flowers fell from

the air down upon him. It was his genius to make things grow” (Jefferies 1939, 309). It is a place, the narrative stresses, in which Iden, Alere, Amaryllis, and presently Amadis (her beloved) may rest and recover: “believe me,” says the narrator (339), “the plain plenty, and the rest, and peace, and sunshine of an old farmhouse, there is nothing like it in this world!” As the narrator adds, “there was a magic power of healing in the influences of this place which Iden had created” (310). Here, in a place that is “their parliament house” (309), and in language whose sophistication belies their relatively humble origins and stations, these characters turn over serious subjects, from the nature of city-life to the question of love itself. And this insistence on conversation—on thought and on words rather than on action—marks another of the ways in which the novel resembles the pastoral: its obvious emphasis on dialogue, as characters converse and the narrator interjects.

But does language therefore take primacy? Schur insists that the pastoral’s “principal subject is language itself” (1989, 5) and that, in its reflexivity, the pastoral denies its own status as anything other than a literary mode or genre, without real roots in an extra-referential reality. The good place is, simply, an imagined space. Yet the good place is also an imaginative space—a space for the imagination—in which it is possible, as Schur acknowledges, to work out and respond to the challenges of the historical moment in which the pastoral is situated. The *Eclogues*, in which Virgil introduced a new note of transformation, turmoil, and even “catastrophic loss” (Davis 2010, ix), is itself an example of this responsiveness. Thus, the pastoral contains the seeds of its own transformation: in spite of its playful insistence on language, it refers outwards to a shifting reality that in turn transforms the pastoral itself. This is the key to understanding what Jefferies achieves in *Amaryllis*. If we look at the novel more closely, we can detect some of the ways in which it repositions the pastoral in relation to the historical shifts enacted by industrial modernity; we can see, in other words, the ways in which *Amaryllis* looks forward to the kind of ecologically reflexive mode Gifford has defined as the post-pastoral (1999, 146–74).

Towards a (New) Materialist Post-Pastoral

The Britain that Jefferies knew (he was born in 1848) was newly urbanized and industrialized, and this epochal change was both recent and problematic; in the cities, problems of pollution and sanitation had yet to be fully addressed, and as Mike Hulme points out (2009, 42–48), the deeper problems brought about by industrial modernity—such as enhanced global warming—were only just beginning to command scientific attention. In the countryside, modernity was also having a variety of often unwelcome

effects, ranging from urban encroachment and the transposition of pollution (Luckin 2015, 14) to rural migration. Other effects were also becoming discernible, most notably the gradual industrialization of agricultural modes of production, and the beginnings of a concomitant shift from smallholdings to larger farms and mono-cultural forms of cultivation.

What we now think of as the Anthropocene—a geological epoch defined by the impress of human activity—was, therefore, underway, and Jefferies was well placed to recognize its effects and guess at the deeper transformation it involved. Critics have always pondered the problem of how to classify Jefferies (novelist, nature writer, journalist of field and farm?), but it is precisely because he encompasses all these identities that his apparently *sui generis* works like *Amaryllis* are so fascinating: they act as early intimations of the literary capacity to respond to the Anthropocene, as here, by resituating the pastoral. In *Amaryllis*, the reason for that shift lies in the importance that rural spaces take on at the very moment that industrial modernity threatens to extinguish them. The pastoral hinges on the distinction between and existence of both city and country; when the one threatens to subsume the other, the pastoral's very existence comes under threat. That pressure can be felt in a shift in tone, as pastoral idyll gives way to elegy, a lament for what is lost or passing. Yet in the same spirit as his heroine, “the revolutionary Amaryllis” (Jefferies 1939, 275), Jefferies takes the opposite approach: he rejects the apparently inexorable logic of industrial modernity, and does so by reasserting the reality (and constitutive importance) of the pastoral he describes.

Take, for example, Iden's habit of “paddling in the grass” (238):

Of a summer's eve, when the day's work among the hot hay was done, Iden would often go out and sit under the russet apple till the dew had filled the grass like a green sea. When the tide of the dew had risen he would take off his heavy boots and stockings, and so walk about in the cool shadows of eve, paddling in the wet grass. He liked the refreshing coolness and the touch of the sward . . . (238)

This is one of Iden's many, apparently idiosyncratic modes of being, modes that are integral to his own flourishing, yet the narrative's emphasis on these intra-actions (a term Barad uses to signify “*the mutual constitution of entangled agencies*” [2007, 33; italics in the original]) is not confined to those moments when “Nature” is invoked, as in this example. In *Amaryllis*, the focus extends to other, more prosaic aspects of these bodily, material intra-actions. After eating his midday meal, Iden dozes with his head resting against the wainscot, wrestling with the worries of farming, of fatherhood, and of family. Over time, his head has worn a hollow in the wood, and in its own way that hollow constitutes a testament to Iden's “continued devotion” to home-life. “This human mark reminded one

of the grooves worn by the knees of generations of worshippers in the sacred steps of the temple,” the narrator continues; “it was intensely—superlatively—human” (Jefferies 1939, 216–17). It is, in other words, the mark of another kind of nature: human nature, which Iden embodies in all its complexity.

Perhaps the most fascinating and revealing examples of this concentration on material entanglement occurs during a dinner scene, which spans several chapters (Jefferies 1939; chapters II–V), a scene which is all the more remarkable because conversation forms no part of it. The meal’s centerpiece is a leg of mutton, carefully chosen by Iden himself. Iden venerates food, and takes “personal care” over it, and what follows is a kind of paean to “grass-fed meat” (209): “for it was genuine; and there was . . . a sense of reality about it” (298). Here is a sample of a much longer discussion:

The meat was dark brown, as mutton should be, for if it is the least bit white it is sure to be poor; the grain was short, and ate like bread and butter, firm, and yet almost crumbling to the touch; it was full of juicy red gravy, and cut pleasantly . . . you can tell good meat directly you touch it with the knife. It was cooked to a turn, and had been done at a wood fire on a hearth; no oven taste, no taint of coal gas or carbon; the pure flame of wood had browned it. Such emanations as there may be from burning logs are odorous of the woodland, of the sunshine, of the fields and fresh air; the wood simply gives out as it burns the sweetness it has imbibed through its leaves from the atmosphere which floats above grass and flowers. (209)

This is, as David Garnett observed (1939, viii), a kind of poetry in prose—a pastoral poetry, rooted in country living—but it is also one that does not shirk the obvious implication: that in Jefferies’s pastoral, sheep are there for the eating. While we might now read this passage with an uncomfortable awareness of the way it celebrates a carnivorous culture, and the fact that raising livestock is itself a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, we may also recognize in it an expression of the argument that Jacques Derrida would make: that to eat well is to determine “the best, most respectful, most grateful, and also most giving way of relating to the other and of relating the other to the self” (Derrida 1995, 281–82); it is to celebrate, cherish, and commemorate what is being eaten.

For Iden, this celebration encompasses the ritualized structure of the meal itself, the respectful silence that must attend the meal, and even the fact that the meal must then be succeeded by a pause in the working day. Moreover, every part of Iden’s meal, no matter how ordinary, has its place, a value directly related to the context of its production and creation, in the same way that the manner of its cooking invokes and evokes woodland, fields, “fresh air,” and “the sweetness . . . which floats above grass and

flowers.” “There is something beyond what the laboratory can lay hands,” the narrative continues as it explains Iden’s “edible philosophy”; “something that cannot be weighed, or seen, or estimated” (Jefferies 1939, 212).

Absurd as this may seem—at least to Mrs. Iden—the narrator takes a different view; as constant slippages between first and third person narrations suggest, the narrator sides with Iden, and he does so at the expense of the novel’s predominantly urban readership. “People in grand villas,” the narrator observes, referencing the new trend towards suburban dwelling, “scarcely ever have anything worth eating on their tables” (Jefferies 1939, 209). What is true of meat is also true of potatoes, carefully cultivated by Iden himself, and “equal to the finest bread—far, far superior to the bread with which the immense city of London permits itself to be poisoned” (209).

As instances of this attentiveness to (and investment in) rural materialities multiply, it becomes clear that Jefferies has reversed the ironizing course of the conventional pastoral, and diverted it towards the city folk that constitute his readers; to what may have been their discomfort, they are now the ones whose way of life is being criticized. The related point is that, in passages such as these, and whether the subject is paddling in the grass, the wear on the wainscot, or the proper way in which to eat (or, after Derrida, “*bien manger*” [1995, 282]), Jefferies’s playful, sometimes sardonic tone evaporates. These topics are serious, because what is at stake is the most fundamental question of all—how to live well, or more exactly, how to live well in the modern moment, a moment in which matter has come to take on a new and sometimes risky significance. “Passing a gasworks perhaps you may have noticed that the surface of the water in the ditch by the roadside bears a greenish scum, a pale prismatic scum,” writes the narrator; “this is the colour-box of modern landscape” (Jefferies 1939, 317). This new, industrialized world looks unnatural, the narrative implies, and must therefore be unhealthy; and what matters more than ever is the kind of space that remains untouched by those new and unnatural colors.

What the novel constitutes, in other words, is not, as Garnett maintained, a gesture of resignation or even an act of defeatism from one of those contrarians “who prefer dying out to adapting themselves to the machine-made age” (1939, viii). It is rather that, in the final months of his own life, Jefferies fully appreciated how best to live, and saw that life was compromised and sometimes crippled by this “machine-made age”; and as scene follows scene, it becomes clear that the novel is itself directly concerned to celebrate actively (rather than commemorate passively) the value and importance of these intimate encounters with the material world. As such, and as Jefferies shifts the emphasis of his pastoral away from playful literary construct to serious engagement with lived realities, we can see how it anticipates Gifford’s definition of the post-pastoral: the novel has

shifted its foundational premise from Derrida's concept of *différance*, in which meaning is endlessly deferred by its own entrapment within language itself, to what Leonard M. Scigaj calls *référance*, or "the referential origin of all language" (Scigaj 1996, 6; see Gifford 1999, 149). The post-pastoral insists that language truly is "about" something—in this case, the agential, material world—and our responsibility towards it cannot be ignored and itself deferred (Gifford 149–50). The *nature* of our entanglement with that world—after Barad, co-constitutive, processual, continuous (2007, 32–35)—suggests that any denial of this relationship is also a kind of denial of self, and as Jefferies insists, a denial of a full and healthy life: it is only by accepting and embracing that immersion in the material world that we can make ourselves whole, a lesson that characters such as Alere have self-evidently recognized.

This is itself an aspect of the post-pastoral, as Gifford has argued: a return to and recognition of the "continuum between external nature . . . and our internal nature" (1999, 157), an act of recuperation which is itself recuperative. Amadis feels it: immersed in the blooming, budding paradise that Iden has spent a lifetime fashioning, "the deadly paleness of Amadis Iden's cheeks . . . began to give way to the faintest colour" (Jefferies 1939, 332). But while Jefferies allows Amadis his moment of unadulterated happiness in Iden's company, he nowhere pretends that it constitutes a complete cure: "the body—the tree—was there, but the life was not in it" (311). As Gifford maintains, the post-pastoral is also defined by an acceptance that the universe entails destruction as well as creation, death as well as life (153); these aspects of it are integral and unavoidable, and just as much a part of what it is to be human.

As Gifford adds, the post-pastoral insists on "an awe in attention to the natural world" (1999, 152): rather than reduce nature to the kind of benign backdrop on which (for example) a simple, sentimental form of pastoral depends (see Marx 1964, 5–6), the post-pastoral acknowledges nature's enormity and "radical aliveness" (Barad 2007, 33), and positions us, as co-dependent humans, in humbling relation to it (Gifford 152). This sense of co-dependency has important implications. To be a constitutive part of the universe—and to recognize that relationship—is also to accept that "with consciousness comes conscience" (Gifford 1999, 163), a conscience evidenced by Iden's attentiveness to his environs. But the final aspect of the post-pastoral, Gifford contends, is the recognition of the intimate connection between environmental degradation and social inequalities such as "the exploitation of women" (165): both have their roots in the same manipulative mentality, made manifest in the way that capitalism operates and industrial modernity impacts and distorts the inseparable intimacy of what Barad calls "naturalcultural practices" (2007, 32). "The gift of conscience," argues Gifford, "must address both

environmental and social exploitation at the same time if there is to be social justice *and* a place for it to be practised” (1999, 165).

How, then, does Jefferies’s novel take up and resolve these themes? Simply, it does not: resisting the need to tie up its own loose ends, *Amaryllis* offers no solutions to the problems it poses. Iden has made a kind of earthly paradise, a pastoral preserve against modernity whose value the novel endorses but refuses to save or spare: Iden’s creditors have not been paid; Grandfather Iden fails to step in with his fabled fortune; and the farm’s foreclosure seems all but inevitable. “[N]othing ever happens in the fitness of things,” the narrator acknowledges, choosing instead to end his narrative (almost wilfully) with “an Intermezzo,” in which the lovers are glimpsed amidst the “dancing shadows of summer, among the long grass and the wild flowers” (Jefferies 1939, 344). “Let the Play of Human Life, with its sorrows and its Dread, pause awhile,” says the narrator; “let Debt and Poverty unrobe . . . Let us leave our lovers in the Interlude in Heaven” (344).

Thus, the novel ends without offering any answers to the difficulties it depicts. Yet there is a sense in which the novel does point to a possible future for Iden’s post-pastoral idyll, and it lies with Amaryllis, to whom Jefferies gives the voice that Theocritus and Virgil deny her. Amaryllis combines the Iden and Flamma lines, merging the strength of one with the urgency of the other: she possesses “poetic feelings” and “generous sentiments” (Jefferies 1939, 343), but also a defiant, even revolutionary fervor. Sharing her father’s respect for the nonhuman world, and his attentiveness to human entanglements with it, she is, one could say, a kind of nascent (eco-)feminist, hostile to the socio-economic demands of a capitalist system that insists on regarding everything (and everyone) as a resource waiting to be exploited, and defiant in her rejection of the role and secondary status that a patriarchal society imposes upon her. In turn, and profound as her love for Amadis may be, his own illness forecloses the possibility of marriage; tragic as this may be, it opens up a space within which Amaryllis can forge her own, independent path. As Edward Thomas wrote of *Amaryllis* (1909, 267), there is a sequel here, waiting to be written, in which Amaryllis comes to maturity, and that “Interlude in Heaven” becomes the basis of something enduring.

Conclusion

Written in the midst of industrial modernity’s transformation of the Victorian world, *Amaryllis* is a subtle and complex attempt to (re)negotiate the pastoral. As I have argued,

the novel responds to modernity's pressure on it at the level of both form and content: it reasserts its claim to (moral) consideration by insisting on its own material-discursive reality, and on the reality of the world to which it refers. The novel constitutes, in other words, a next step in the evolution of the pastoral, rooted in a mindful (new) materialism that acknowledges the way in which, in all its myriad forms, an agential reality impacts on—and is inseparable from—human realities. The corollary is that this human dimension also impacts the material world, threatening the patterns of intra-activity on which nonhuman and human flourishing alike depend. Against that background, Jefferies's depiction of a pastoral "Interlude in Heaven" (1939, 344) takes on a new importance. And while Jefferies refuses to offer any obvious antidote to the pressures that imperil this post-pastoral moment of mutual flourishing, he does offer in the character of Amaryllis a principled and potentially formidable figure who shares her father's understanding of the constitutive entanglements that ground human existence, and who might one day contrive a way in which to make this pastoral "Intermezzo" permanent.

Notes

¹ With its emphasis on the entanglements that iteratively constitute all forms of existence, Barad's theory of agential realism (developed fully in *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 2007) provides this essay with its new materialist touchstone. Space precludes a fuller discussion of new materialist theories, or their influence on environmental literary criticism (or "ecocriticism"), but for useful introductions to both, see Coole and Frost (2010) and Iovino and Oppermann (2014) respectively.

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