

Point Blank 'Was'

with apologies to Mister Faulkner
Damon Falke

It should be difficult for any of us to write about where we grew-up, to write about where we call home, or where we once called home. There are the expected trappings of sentiment and the near constant questioning of ourselves over how things really were. But then similar to telling a story, we might go ahead anyway, accepting the risk.

I came to Moab as a young boy, not yet a teenager. I spent the remainder of my youth in the town, and then spent another decade coming in and out of the first place I called home. The start though was 30 years ago. My father was a Baptist preacher, so in theory my family could have ended up any place. That's in theory, however. In prayer there was no other place that my father or family could have gone. So we came up from Texas, and for me, then, Moab was another world, and I do not mean the town and surrounding desert were interesting or made for some kind of an awakening—though perhaps these things were true—but I mean Moab at that time opened another world. My understanding of worlds tells me that there are other worlds to claim, provided another world is found, and Moab was such a world to be found and one that can no longer be claimed. The valley I looked at those years ago is no longer possible to see. That is a plain fact. The valley, as it was then, no longer exists.



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And two days after my family arrived in Moab, I went on my first walk through the town. There was one fast-food chain, one small grocery store, one drug store that I remember, a couple of

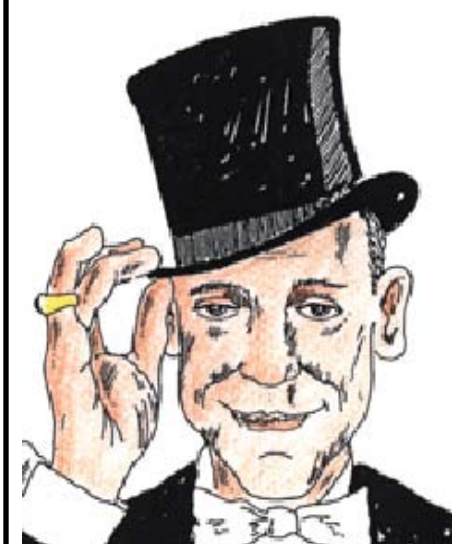
gas stations and a place called the Western Grill or The Westerner. I'm not sure which anymore. I remember The Westerner because after I got lost the diner was the first place I noticed where maybe I could've asked someone for directions. I looked in the front windows and determined this was not a place for a child to ask for anything. Probably someone would have helped me, some cowboy, some rancher, some hand could have given me an idea of where I was and where I was going, but then I didn't ask. I was, after all, a child. Although I didn't go into the diner, I told

myself that one day I would eat eggs and drink coffee there, and I did, eventually. Otherwise, I went on my way.

Perhaps like everyone who comes to Moab, I was captured by the panoramic sweep of the place. But what I think about now when I consider my beginnings in the town is how I began to look close at things in a world. I noticed weeds growing from cracks in sidewalks. I noticed how few cars were on Main Street. I noticed the waxy greens of cottonwood leaves, which I had never seen in Texas. In part, the town invited this habit of looking, but maybe we all look more closely at those beginnings and endings that shape us.


There are moments that trigger before and after into certain experiences and even entire epochs of our lives. Moab, for me, was a place of beginnings and endings. It was a place of actualities and things hoped for—some curious mixture of facts and what any of us might wish for when looking back at our lives and where we lived, where we grew up, and where we became what we did or did not become. Moab was that beginning for me, a start into a place now gone. That's not sentiment either. That's what William Faulkner might have called "was." And I like that notion. Moab became my was.

Damon Falke's most recent work, Now at the Uncertain Hour, was performed by Square Top Theater Company with a grant from New York Council on the Humanities. His work has appeared on the Reflections West radio program and in numerous literary journals. His recent novella, By Way of Passing, is published by Shechem Press. He lives abroad.




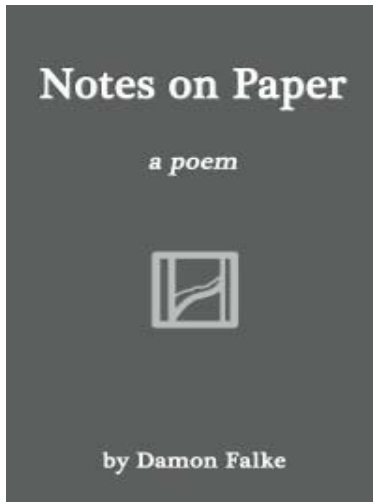
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and really it never can be, the narrator bids us survey our own memories, taking time in the present for the winds, and the words, that move the world.

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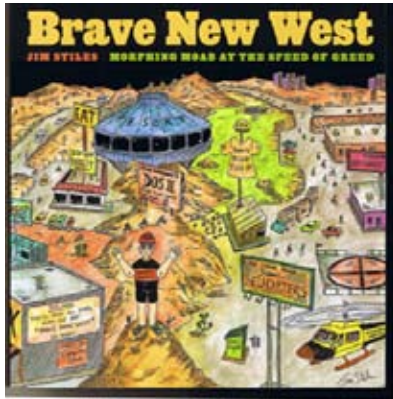


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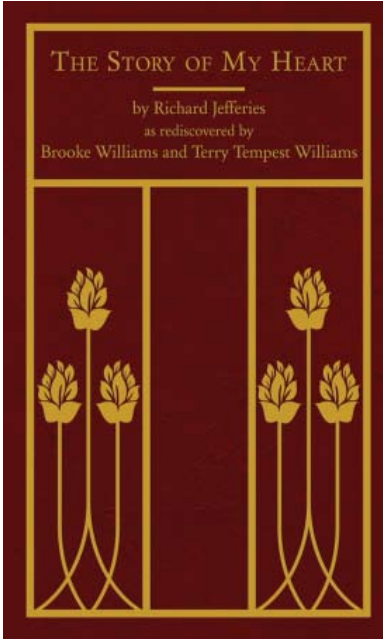
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Brooke and Terry Tempest Williams came across a copy of British nature writer Richard Jefferies' *The Story of My Heart* in a small Maine bookstore. The beautiful volume intrigued the couple and inspired a journey: they traveled to England in order to learn more about the 19th-century nature essayist, to wander the countryside which so inspired and captivated him. Delving into this love letter to nature strengthened and refreshed Terry and Brooke's relationship with each other and with the natural world.

Originally published in 1883, *The Story of My Heart* explores the existence of a "soul-life" as Jefferies experienced while wandering in England. With an introduction by Terry and essays by Brooke alongside Jefferies' original work, these two beloved writers and environmentalists contemplate dilemmas of modernity, the intrinsic need for wildness, and what it means to be human in the 21st century. Scott Slovic, editor of *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, provides the afterword.

Terry and Brooke will be reading and signing from the book here on December 1, 7pm.

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