

Letters

FUGITIVE PIECES

It would be useful, both from a bibliographical viewpoint and for future research programmes, to have a central source of information regarding the many contributions made to sundry newspapers and periodicals by Henry Williamson.

Many of these, no doubt, are known, albeit not necessarily centrally recorded, yet there must be many small and fugitive periodicals that carried HW's work. One has been told, for instance, of contributions to a newspaper sent to prisoners of war in Italy, of contributions to women's magazines etc. There were articles in the *Co-operative Magazine*, the sundry right-wing journals (*The European* etc.), and regular contributions to *The Listener*, *The Sunday Referee*, *Eastern Daily Press*, and so on and so on. Not to mention the numerous contributions to various American periodicals.

I would be most grateful, therefore, if readers who know of Williamson contributions to newspapers and magazines, who have clippings and cuttings, or who would be willing to do some gentle research for these elusive pieces (London's Colindale newspaper library must be a treasure-trove should anybody have time for such spadework) would send me such details as they have. I will carefully collate all the material that comes to hand and hope to be able to make the information available to any interested parties at some time in the future.

I think that a separate listing of reviews and articles about Williamson would also be of interest; so

any early book notices that you know of (bearing in mind that we already have enough examples of the mealy-mouthed and miserable sixties reviews of *A Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight*) would also meet with grateful acceptance.

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IGNORING THE MESSAGE

I feel I must write as a result of attending David Hoyle's seminar on *The Flax of Dream* and, in particular, *The Pathway* (Putsborough, 17 October 1982). In the atmosphere of academic verbal prowess I felt unable to voice my feelings at the time for fear of emotional overstatement, but I cannot let the word 'dishonest' go unchallenged. Henry can no more be accused of dishonesty than can the dawn which illuminates the world in a golden light. The clear, clean world at dawn becomes meshed over with the grey threads of men's ambition, doubt and jealousy, confirmed at the end of the day by the descent of darkness. This is the aching beauty in a dawn, its vulnerability. In Henry's eyes, and in all his work, the dawn-light shines on the natural world, and he, like us, wants it to shine for ever. He says in these novels, "It can, if only..." and tries by saying "It is so" to make it happen - and it is his vulnerability that touches us so profoundly.

David seemed to be suggesting that if the message (O.K., not new,

but must a message be new to be true?) was not well received (cf. low book sales) the message should have been changed to make it more acceptable. This is the sort of thinking that increasingly is getting into education these days.

Henry illuminated the world for many of us with his dawn-light and is therefore a friend such as one is privileged to find in a lifetime. All his books have a measure of this light, sometimes confused by bitterness, despair, muddled thinking and over-statement, because Henry was human. One is not blind to the faults of a friend; they become endearing as time goes on. He held up a lantern - let's look at the lantern and what it reveals in the light that it sheds, and forgive his stumbling feet.

I enjoyed the weekend very much despite feeling that we were so busy pulling Henry to pieces to see what made him tick that we were ignoring the message. I don't think he would approve of the earnest research into the minutiae of his everyday life. But the balance was fully restored when we went down to the Burrows to ramble amongst the profusion of fascinating plants, and when, coming back over the sands, we were totally drenched in a torrential squall. As water poured into our shoes we laughed with delight at the delicious nonsense of it all, caused entirely by HW getting us there in the first place. We felt clean and refreshed.

Thanks to everyone who organised the weekend.

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CASH NEXUS

Having read Daniel Farson's book on Henry Williamson, I wish to make a comment on Frederic Raphael's criticism, referred to by Farson (p.117): "As for the virtues of the Right, there is a certain charm in the institutionalisation of 'Values' in a society somehow transcending the cash nexus..." Raphael goes on to suggest that this must lead to oppression; adding that HW had a prosaic mind, and that "such men can easily become the Ramsay MacDonalds of literature".

Surely the very opposite is true. It was Ramsay MacDonald, and his successors, who set up the "cash nexus" as a sacred entity, which meant a pall of misery for most of the ordinary people of the U.K. It was against this state of affairs that Phillip Maddison joined Sir Hereward Birkin, and took part in a march to thwart the "cash nexus", "money making money", and all the other MacDonalidian policies.

It should not be lost on all readers of Henry Williamson that the choice of the very name Hereward Birkin is a deliberate echo from the mists of English history: it was Hereward who lead the Saxon polity against the Normans. After all, the Governor of the Bank of England in the thirties was one Sir Montague Norman.

The "cash nexus" being as it was, Sir Hereward and many Phillip Maddisons marched against these things.

ROOTS

I was very interested to read the article on HW's Bedfordshire roots by Tom and Joan Skipper (*Journal No. 6*) as I had myself been surprised to read these references to his birthplace as Bedfordshire.

I am further surprised to read in *Contemporary Novelists*, edited by James Vinson, and in *Who Was Who* (Vol. 7, 1971-80)? that HW's birthplace is Parkstone in Dorset. Can any member shed light on this?

Of far greater importance, however, in considering entries in

reference books, is the complete omission of HW. Would it not be a good idea if the Society were to contact Margaret Drabble who I understand is editing a new edition of *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, to ensure that this time there *is* an entry for HW?*

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**The matter is in hand. Ed.*

ORDEAL BY OWL

From Mr Henry Williamson

Sir,- What kind of an owl was it that confronted the Rev Brian Lucas (December 5) "in the chancel roof of the church of Capel Llanilterms, near Cardiff, with a relentless stare"? Could it have been Satan in a disguise of feathers? For both the barn owl and the tawny owl have a soft, delicate gaze of eyes with bloom of a black grape.

If the relentless stare came from a stuffed owl, the taxidermist surely must have hooked-in the wrong pattern of glass eyes.

Even so - why use owls to catch bats among the rafters? The bats take both furniture and death watch beetles.

Years ago a brown owl used to live in the church of Ham, in North Devon, during weekdays. On Sunday, before the ringing of bells, out it flew; to return, some said, after the sermon.

Yours faithfully, Henry Williamson, Ox's Cross, North Devon.

The Times
7 December 1968