

A TRIBUTE TO FRANCES HOROVITZ

FRANCES HOROVITZ, actress, poet, and teacher, was elected a Vice-President of our Society at its inaugural meeting in Barnstaple on 3 May 1980. Her death, on 2 October 1983, is a heavy loss to the Society, which meant a great deal to her, and she much regretted that her illness had prevented her from taking a fuller part in the Society's activities.

Frances Margaret Hooker was born in the North of England in 1938. After a difficult wartime childhood she graduated in English and Drama at Bristol University, and then trained at RADA in London. She then worked for a time in repertory theatre and in films, and began to be known as a poetry reader on the BBC's Third Programme.

In 1963 she married the poet Michael Horovitz. In the same year her own poetry began to be published in *New Departures*, *The Aylesford Review*, *The Poetry Review*, and other magazines. As editor of *The Aylesford Review* it was natural that I should invite her to visit Aylesford Priory. From the summer of 1964 until I left Aylesford in the autumn of 1968, she was a frequent visitor, and spent many weekends at our guest-house, often accompanied by the young painter Jane Percival, her close friend. It was during a weekend in December 1964 that she first met Henry Williamson, who was visiting the Priory, and had brought with him Ann Quin, whose recently-published first novel, *Berg*, was a current literary sensation. A close friendship grew up between Frances and Henry, and on 14 May 1965 she was one of the guests at the dinner party given by Henry to his particular friends at the Royal Clarence Hotel, Exeter, after the formal presentation to the University of all his earlier manuscripts.

In June 1968, at Spode House, the Dominican conference centre in Staffordshire, Frances took the part of the delightful Emilia in a reading of Thomas Shadwell's comedy *The Sullen Lovers*, the part of Emilia's friend Carolina being taken by another trained actress - also a friend of Henry's - Mary Mudie. Henry had been invited to take part, and modestly chose for himself the role of 'A Country Gent, a grave, ill-bred coxcomb, that never speaks without a proverb'. Frances visited Henry at Twyford Abbey during his last illness, and was present at his funeral in Georgeham in August 1977.

In October 1980 Frances and myself presented at Cheltenham Town Hall, during the annual Literature Festival, an 'entertainment' with the title 'Henry Williamson, Old Soldier', in which Frances read the passages cited from Henry's war-writings. When this was repeated a week later at the



Society's AGM at Georgeham it was recorded by Harry Williamson. This recording is now available to members of the Society in cassette form. As far as I know, this is the only recording ever made of a *prose* reading by Frances Horovitz. Among the BBC's many fine women readers, Frances's voice had a special and unique power and beauty, and in this recording she offers a wonderful rendering and interpretation into sound of Henry's writing.

In 1983 Frances - whose first marriage had broken down several years previously - was able to marry the poet Roger Garfitt, who had nursed her during the whole two-year course of her illness until she was finally cared for at the Royal Marsden Hospital, in London, where she died very peacefully.

Frances never sought her own literary advancement. Her poetic output was relatively small, partly because of the high standard she set herself, partly because for some years she found herself unable to write on account of domestic troubles and anxieties. However, she achieved, all told, a sufficiently substantial body of highly distinguished work. A final volume of her verse is to be published by the Enitharmon Press, after which I hope that her husband will prepare an edition of her *Collected Poems*.

Frances would have been astonished at the outpouring of acclaim and grief that followed on the news of her death. At the great meeting of tribute to her held at the Colston Hall, in Bristol, in October 1983, Seamus Heaney - who had only recently become aware of her work - declared his belief that she was "a great poet". I believe this to be so.

Brocard Sewell

FRANCES HOROVITZ, PRINCIPAL PUBLICATIONS: *Poems*, Aylesford Review Poets 1, 1967; 'The High Tower', *New Departures*, London, 1970; *Water Over Stone*, Enitharmon Press, 1980; Wall, *Four Poets, Four Artists (Frances Horovitz, Roger Garfitt, and others)*, LYC Press, Banks, Brampton, Cumbria, 1982; *Snow Light, Water Light*, Bloodaxe Books, Newcastle-on-Tyne, 1983; Horovitz, M (ed). 'A Celebration of, and for, Frances Horovitz', *New Departures*, Bisley, Glos., 1983. CASSETTES: *Frances Horovitz Reading a Selection of Her Own Work*, BEL Productions Ltd., 37 Jewry Street, Winchester; (with Brocard Sewell), *Henry Williamson: Old Soldier*, HWS (available to members only). Also: Stevenson, Anne. 'Frances Horovitz: an Appreciation', *The Poetry Review*, January 1983.

Photograph © Oswald Jones. L to R: Frances Horovitz, Jane Percival, Henry Williamson, at 57 Ladbroke Road, London W 11, 1965.